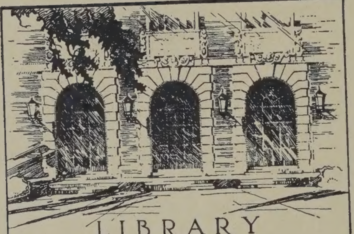

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By

Rida Johnson Young

author of the song
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CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY 1924

VOL. LXXXI NUMBER 1

Serial Stories

THE TWISTED FOOT (Chapters I-IX) . . William Patterson White 33
THE TOKEN (Chapters VIII-XII) . . . . Louis Tracy 77
THE BULLFIGHTER (Chapters XIII-XVIII) . . . T. S. Stribling 117
THE HOUSE OF THE WICKED (Chapters XIV-XVII) Eleanor Gates and Frederick Moore 154
THE TARNISHED WOMAN (Chapters XXI-XXIV) . Vance Thompson 177

Short Stories and Novelette

The Story of Mother Machree (Novelette) . . . Rida Johnson Young 1
The Other Cheek . . . . John D. Swain 59
A Heritage from the Sea . . . . Edward Boltwood 71
N. Terwilliger Takes the Bumps . . . . Louise Kennedy Mabie 96
Collaborators . . . . Edward M. Thierry 107
The Little Green Model . . . . Dawn Powell 135
Nickie and Pem . . . . Elisabeth Sanxay Holding 145
Furze Hollow . . . . A. M. Burrage 168

Poems

Release . . . . Clinton Scollard 32
Heroics . . . . Richard Butler Glaenzer 70
The Mountain Moon . . . Sennett Stephens 76
The Sundial . . . . Mary Louise Mabie 106
A Song of Roses . . Edmund Vance Cooke 116
The Garden of Sleep . Richard Le Gallienne 134
The Sorrow of Love . . . . Richard Leigh 153
The Marches of Infinity . . Harry Kemp 167
Man's First Temples . Charles Buxton Going 176
Paul Verlaine . . . . Charles Divine 192

THE MARCH MUNSEY (on sale Wednesday, February 20) will contain a complete novelette by John D. Swain, "Spending the Evening," one of Mr. Swain's realistic stories of the Paris underworld, and the opening chapters of "Suspicion," an absorbing novel of present-day American life, by Reita Lambert

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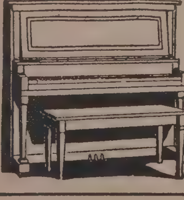

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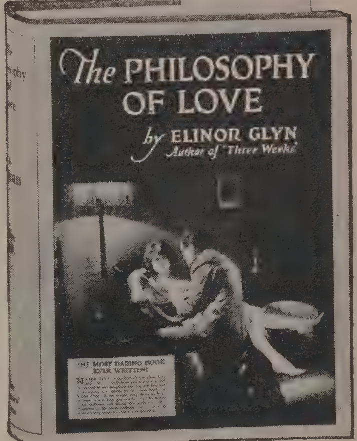

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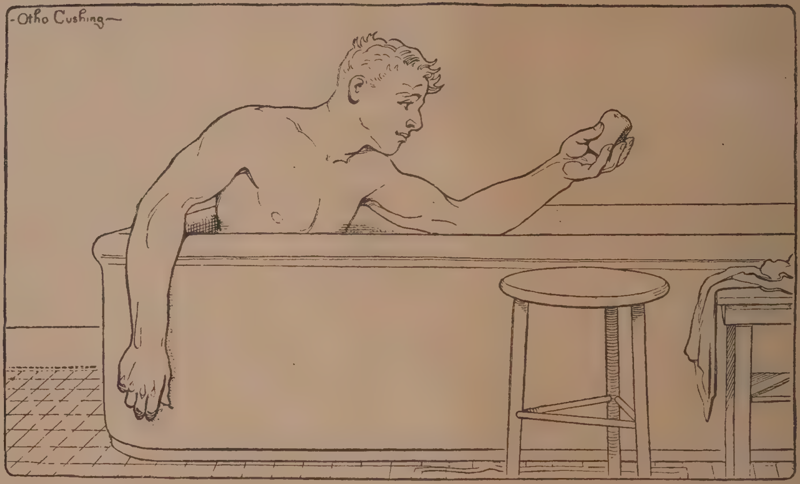

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The Story of Mother Machree

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—THE STORY OF A MOTHER'S LOVE AND SELF-DENIAL

By Rida Johnson Young

Author of the Song "Mother Machree"

THERE was no candle in the window of the little house with the broken thatch. She who had kept it there, always burning for her children, was gone.

There was no flicker of a hearth fire, either, through the panes of the little crooked windows. They looked blind, those pitiful windows, as if the fire had been the soul of them. Now that it had fled, they could no longer reflect the beauty of the world, nor hint, with cheerful winkings, of the snug comfort inside, with the world shut out.

In the gray twilight a few curlews circled above the house, uttering little plaintive cries. They flew low, seeming to be bound down, not free, held to the earth by the weight of the hurrying clouds, which threatened each moment to dissolve into rain—or tears, Ellen McHugh thought, as she watched the birds—tears for the sorrow and loneliness of the world.

She had come up the long road from her own desolated home—the road that went along the shore, where the mist from the sea hung low and palpable, curling the stray wisps of hair on her bare head. Her little head shawl was pinned about the shoulders of Brian, the small lad who came along with her, holding to the skirt of her dress and whimpering a bit from discomfort and hunger.

She had come to her childhood's home, hoping for the comfort of feeling her dead mother's presence there, as sometimes she had sensed it; but it seemed only coming from desolation to despair. The deserted house was nearer the shore than her own, more bare, for the lack of brush about it, more exposed to the wide terror of the sea. Behind it the empty downs seemed to accentuate its isolation. No blessed spirit would haunt the place that wild night, she feared.

Michael, her husband, had often told her that it was ignorant superstition which made her feel that sometimes her mother came back to comfort her. Perhaps it was. Michael had been a well educated man, far above her in many ways. She hadn't his book learning, but she sensed things sometimes—big things, not to be found in any printed word.

She lifted the latch of the little sagging door and went into the house. It was very chill, colder than outside, and the musty smell of years of smoking peat hung heavy on the air.

The boy held back, pulling at her skirt.

" What for, mither? What for be you going in grandmither's house? It's cold and dark," he said.

" Don't say ' be you going,' darlin'. And you must say ' mother.' Your father tellt you time and again. He doesn't favor the brogue."

" But he's dead, father is. Isn't father dead?"

" All the more reason," said Ellen, " that you should please him, and do as he willed when he was here."

The child couldn't understand this. He stood by the open door, afraid to go out alone or to come in with her. His mother went to the cold hearth, and sat upon a worn cutty stool there, her head in her hands.

The whimper that he had tried to stifle all the way on the long road broke into an open cry. He was only a little lad, around five years or so. He was tired and cold and hungry, and bewildered, too, by the sad proceedings of the day. His father had been placed in a long box and laid away in the little churchyard—his father, to whom people took off their caps as they did to the squire—his father, who was very severe, and yet had unbent at times and had ridden the boy upon his foot to Banbury Cross.

Ellen lifted her face, down which the tears were streaming, and put out her arms to the lad.

" Come over, darlin'," she said. " Come to mother's knee, while I warm you awhile."

The lad came to her, crying loudly, his mouth stretched in an agony of misery from the discomfort of the cold and his empty stomach and the many things which he could not understand. His mother cuddled him in her arms, bidding him be quiet for a spell, and she would take him home again.

The sobs ceased abruptly. He was a good child, and patient with the pathetic patience of the children of the very poor.

Presently she began to talk to him—crooning, just above a breath, more as if she were talking to herself.

" Your father was a gentleman, Brian—never forget that. He was a schoolmaster—mind you that! Maybe it was but in the hedges he taught, with no pay but a few petaties and a bag o' meal, and maybe sometimes a flitch o' bacon. He was a schoolmaster, for all of that, with as much learning to the inside of his head as those that teach in the big schools in Dublin, with a roof over their heads and real pay to it. The McHughs are not to be sneezed at, Brian lad. They're gentlefolks away back, and had land of their own; and he was always plannin' to make a scholar of you and a gentleman, and that's what's before us to do, lad. I promised your father on his deathbed, some way or another, I'd make a scholar and a gentleman of you!"

" And I'll have oatcake and bacon every day!" said Brian, vastly comforted by the prospect.

" Oatcake and bacon every day," his mother repeated absently. " Be quiet a bit now, and see if I can hear some word will tell me which way to turn."

They were very quiet for a long time—so quiet that Brian fell asleep on his mother's breast.

The night gathered and grew more chill. Through the open door the mist blew in from the sea. There was no sound, to mortal ears, save the rustling of the wind in the thatch and the thunder of the surf on the shore; but Ellen was comforted and counseled.

Who shall say what voice reached her inner hearing? Who shall say what guidance fixed her half formed purpose of somehow making her way to America, the land of promise—the land where Brian could have his chance with the best to be a scholar and a gentleman? At any rate, the silent hours in her mother's house resulted in this determination. She would go to America! She would give Brian his chance!

It was an hour or more before she rose, with the sleeping child in her arms, and stood for a moment in silent farewell, her eyes trying to find the dearly familiar outlines of the room, her ears strained for the sound of a voice which would have bidden her Godspeed wherever she went. All around was dark and silence. The wild, black night outside seemed light by comparison, as she went into it, clasping the child tightly and bending her body to the wind.

In those days—some time in the forties, it was—going to America was not the light and easy adventure it is now. It was an undertaking to be looked at this way and that, and well talked over and considered.

Ellen knew that her neighbors would try to dissuade her from her purpose, if she spoke of it. A lone woman with a child, and only a few pennies in her purse! And the thousands of miles to go, with the great sea to be crossed! They'd have both the priest and the minister at her, day and night—she knew that. Maybe they would persuade her to take her comfort as she could find it, among her own people, and to abandon Brian to a life of poverty and ignorance.

It was a hard thing to do, but she decided to slip away in the morning, while the determination was hot within her, without a word to any one.

After a sleepless night, she rose with the dawn and made her simple preparations for departure. There was little to do. Her few poor sticks of furniture must be left behind, of course, and they would make up to the landlord for the rent which was overdue.

When they had finished their meager breakfast, there was still half an oatcake left, besides some meal and a few potatoes. These she put in a rush basket, which she gave to Brian to carry. Then she made a bundle of their scanty possessions, and, slinging it over her shoulder, set out upon the great adventure.

II

Ellen had determined to go first to Dublin. It was a long way from Ballymoney, clear through County Wicklow, but she had a brother there, apprenticed to a cooper. She thought that perhaps he could help her to get to America.

It was a bright, clear morning—one of those rare days which have made Ireland the jewel isle of song and story, not the cold, misty land, dank and cheerless, which it is for two hundred and more days of the year. These perfect days are the ones which Ireland's sons, who have left her, remember. They forget the others, and the dark and cold and sadness of them.

Ellen and Brian stepped briskly along the shore road. Brian capered with delight. They were going somewhere, away from the sadness and tears, out into the great world where anything might happen. Mother had said they were going to America. He guessed they'd be there before night, and be happy ever after!

By noon they had gone as far as the outskirts of Arklow. From a hill they could see the chimneys of that snug little town.

"Is it America, Mother Machree?" asked Brian.

Mother Machree! How sweet that name sounded from the boy's lips! "Mother, my darling," it meant. 'Twas so her husband had called her often, after Brian had come to them.

She sighed, and put her hand upon the lad's head caressingly.

"No! No! 'Tis a long ways from America yet. We'll have to cross the broad seas to get there; but we're on our way, Brian, and you're not to grow weary nor give up, however hard the road."

"I won't," said Brian stoutly; "but I'm hungry now."

"We'll go down there where you see the little stream," said Ellen, "and have a bite from the basket, and a sup of the cold water. We'll be needing it after the long walk."

Brian ran before her, down the hill, to where there was a thick growth of ash trees about a dancing stream. Behind the trees he found a cart standing—a curiously painted cart with a hood over the back half of it. A piebald horse, released from the shafts, was grazing near it.

Farther along he saw three people seated about a fire, upon which a pot was boiling. They were such unusual-looking people that Brian halted and drew back, afraid, and waited for his mother to come. He peered through the brush at the strange group around the fire.

There was a boy—or was it a man no taller than a boy? Short and thick he was, with legs that bowed out, as he busied himself about the fire. He wore a strange doublet of patchwork in bright colors, and green stockings wrinkled upon his misshapen legs.

Stretched flat upon the ground there was a long man—as long as a rake, thought Brian, and almost as thin. He, too, was attired unconventionally, in a clinging garment of red, like an undershirt and drawers sewn together. His boots were off, and he was kicking his big bare feet in the air.

The third man was not so unusual in appearance, and was clad in more conventional garb; but he had a quantity of fierce-looking black hair, which hung down to his shoulders and dangled before his eyes.

Presently Brian's mother came from behind the ash trees, and she, too, started aback and stared at the three strange men. The little man—or was it a boy?—turned and saw her.

"Good day," he called, in a piping voice.

Brian ran to his mother, and clung tightly to her hand. The long, thin man sat up. The black-haired one turned about and looked at them.

"Well! Well!" he cried, and his voice boomed so loudly that Ellen and the boy were affrighted by it. "Welcome to our sylvan retreat!"

"I only wanted—" said Ellen, stammering. "We're making the road to Dublin, and we thought to have a bite to eat by the stream. We wouldn't wish to intrude upon you."

She spoke primly. It somehow reminded Brian of the way his father had used to speak.

"Intrude, is it?" said the black-haired man. "Sure and it's God's free world! Come over and have a loan of our fire, and brew your tea along with us!"

"I haven't any tea," said Ellen, approaching bashfully. "I only wanted the water."

"No tea? No tea?" boomed the man. "Then you must share ours. 'Tis good and black and bitter from long brewin'."

Ellen protested, but there was no refusing the good-natured kindliness of the man. Presently she and Brian were seated about the fire, very much surprised and a little perturbed by the strange company in which they found themselves.

"'Tis a traveling show we are," explained the man, noting that the girl could scarcely look at them for embarrassment, and that the child's eyes were wide with wonder! "This here is Pips the Dwarf. Yon's the Kilkenny Giant, and myself, I'm the Golden Harpist o' Wexford."

The dwarf acknowledged the introduction by making a face at them and turning a handspring. The Kilkenny Giant nodded silently, and began to pull on his boots, which had thick soles and prodigious heels. As if he could make himself decent for company in that way, thought Ellen, dressed in his underclothes as he was! She had never seen tights before.

"And so you and your little brother are off to Dublin?" asked the harpist.

"It's not my brother—'tis my own child he is. Brian McHugh is his name."

The harpist looked as if he could scarce believe this.

"You seem overyoung to be havin' a big boy the likes of that. It couldn't be you are a widdy woman?"

"I am that," said Ellen.

The dwarf had given her a pewter cup of black tea. She sipped it. It seemed delicious. It was long since she had tasted tea.

"Have ye come far?" the man asked.

"From Ballymoney," answered Ellen. "I'm hopin' my brother in Dublin will help me to get to America."

"America!" exclaimed the harpist. "That's no place for a fine young woman like you, with your good looks and the mark of real gentlefolks upon you! They'll be making a hired girl of you over there, and puttin' all manner of slights on you!"

Ellen raised her head proudly.

"They'll make no hired girl of me!" she said, with spirit. "I'm a great hand at fine sewing and knitting."

The harpist shook his head.

"They'll make a hired girl of you," he persisted. "They do it to all that goes there, and there's no risin' above it once you've started into it, for all their grand talk of democracy and one bein' as good as another!"

"I have a brother that's in America," said the Kilkenny Giant.

He spoke very solemnly, in a deep voice which seemed to come from his boots. Ellen forced herself to look in his direction. It was very uncomfortable to be addressed by a man clad in garments which one usually hid decently from public gaze.

"Once I had a letter from him," the giant went on. "All the way from America I had a letter. He said it was fine there. He said he was eatin' meat every day but Friday, and could then, if he would. He wrote me word of a man by the name of Barnum would give something for a big felly like me, to show off to the folks over there."

He looked askance at the harpist, who flared into sudden anger.

"You're gettin' more than you're worth now!" he snapped. "Share and share alike, and you as thin as a herrin'—no proper giant at all!"

"I'm seven foot two without me boots," said the giant defensively.

The dwarf joined issue with the harpist, and jeered:

"Small good you are at all to the show, with never a trick nor a caper to you! Share and share alike is too much, only to stand up and be gaped at. Not even a jig to the foot of you! I'm worth two of him for bringing in the pennies!"

To prove his assertion, the dwarf picked up a long knife from the ground and seemed to swallow it, bringing it out again at the pit of his stomach.

"Could ye do that, ye might be talkin' of bein' showed off in America!"

The giant seemed much abashed.

"I wasn't sayin' I was going to America," he said, a trifle sulkily; "though there might be them there would appreciate me better than here."

"And that wouldn't be much!" the harpist and dwarf exclaimed, almost in unison.

They wouldn't allow Ellen to take any of the food from her basket, but insisted upon her and Brian sharing the rabbit stew which was simmering upon the fire.

"Though 'tis not much of a stew," said the harpist. "My wife, she who was called the Whistling Hen, could make a rabbit stew would stand next to a stuffed peacock on the table of the lord mayor; but I lost her awhile since, and we do the best we can."

"I'm sorry for you," said Ellen, looking at him gently. "Death, 'tis hard!"

"Oh, it wasn't that way I lost her. She ran away with the other giant. That's the reason I have to put up with *him*."

He motioned with his thumb toward the Kilkenny Giant, who looked abashed and apologetic. Ellen felt sorry for the man.

"He's very tall," she said politely. "I don't know as I ever saw a higher man."

"Tall is all right," the harpist agreed grudgingly; "but thick and tall is the way they like 'em. He's no proper giant at all, but I had me handbills printed, and I had to be takin' the best I could find. Giants are as scarce in Ireland as snakes. I don't know but what St. Patrick had a word to say to them, too. The other giant would have made two of him, and he could jig, and had a great way with the ladies."

The harpist sighed reminiscently.

"He must have had!" thought Ellen, with the first gleam of humor lighting her mind for many a day.

"If you could cook, now!" The harpist looked up at her questioningly through his shaggy locks. "We're making the road to Dublin ourselves. We'd give you and the lad a lift in the cart, and welcome, just to have a woman's hand at the cooking again."

Ellen looked at him doubtfully. It would never do, she thought. Michael wouldn't like it at all, could he look down and see her traveling the road with show folks; but what a help it would be! The way was so long!

"Of course she can cook. I can tell by the looks of her," said the dwarf.

"I can cook fine," Ellen assented, "when there's anything to cook, but—"

"You'll find no lack that way with us," the harpist interrupted eagerly. "We spend a bit of money between us when we come to the towns; and in the country, what are game laws to come between an honest man and his dinner?"

"That's true," said Ellen gravely, turning over in her mind the matter of staying with them. "Nobody would begrudge you a rabbit or a bird now and then, I'm sure."

"Nor a sucking pig, neither," said Pips, grinning, "should one be running around loose and wild like."

Thereupon the dwarf turned a flip-flap and ran about on all fours, squealing like a young pig before the knife. His antics made them all laugh heartily, except the giant, who seemed not to see much humor in anything.

A good laugh shared goes a long way to putting folks at ease with one another. In a few moments Ellen found herself thanking the harpist for his offer of a lift to Dublin, and assuring him that she would do her best to be useful by the way.

III

After the meal was done, Ellen insisted upon washing the pots and the few battered pewter dishes in the stream, while the men stamped out the fire and hitched the piebald horse to the cart. Then she and Brian were helped to mount over the wheel, and were seated upon a bare plank which ran across the back under the hood. There was a small harp behind them in a green baize cover. Pips squatted in the straw on the floor of the cart. The giant sat with the harpist on the driving seat.

It was strange company, Ellen thought, for her boy and herself to be in. She was glad they were far from Ballymoney, so that no one they knew would see them; but it meant getting to Dublin and being fed by the way, so the arrangement began to look like a very lucky chance to her.

It was not so pleasant when they came to Arklow, for the people began to come out of their houses to stare at them, and small boys followed them along the road. It was very disagreeable indeed when the cart halted and the harpist descended and began to harangue the crowd in his booming voice. The giant stood up on the driving seat, widening the stretch of his legs, so that Pips could thrust his head between them and grimace and wink at the crowd.

Ellen's face burned. The people stared at her, too, and at Brian, as if they expected them to contribute in some way to the entertainment.

The harp was taken from its covering and handed down by Pips, who made a great show of letting it fall. At last he did fall with it, over the side of the cart, landing on his feet like a cat.

The harpist played some simple airs—old-fashioned things which delighted the people. Pips swallowed knives, stuck pins in his ears and nostrils, and turned flip-flaps, to the accompaniment of " oh's " and " ah's " and delighted laughter. The giant leaned over the side of the cart and shook hands with little boys and girls, who saw him much bigger than he was at that height. He was very solemn, too, which made him seem much more gigantic and frightening.

It was a simple entertainment, but evidently very satisfying to those unsophisticated country folk. There were quite a number of pennies in the hat which Pips passed about, and those who had no penny gave a blessing, which was received as gratefully by Pips as if it were a bag of gold.

" May it come back to you," he would say, " and doubled!"

Pennies or blessings, it seemed all the same to Pips, although he squabbled fiercely enough over an odd penny when they had come out into the country again and stopped to divide the takings. They came near to an open fight, the three of them, until the giant suggested that the odd penny should be given to Brian. This being agreeable to the others, Brian got the penny, much to his amazement and delight. He had never had a penny of his own before.

It was a slow journey they made to Dublin, stopping wherever the smallest audience could be gathered together, and dallying for long hours over their food, in the preparation of which Ellen grew wonderfully skillful. She performed prodigious culinary feats with nothing but an old skillet and a copper kettle to her hand. They were three weeks upon the way.

At night Ellen and Brian slept in the straw at the bottom of the cart. The men had slept there before, side by side, letting down the dashboard for the giant's feet to stick out behind; but now they gathered their cloaks about them and slept upon the ground. They discounted sore muscles by contented stomachs, and felt no loss in the bargain.

Soon her strange traveling companions began to seem like old friends to Ellen—especially the Kilkenny Giant, who rarely spoke, but who showed her many little kindnesses. He was Brian's favorite, too. Sometimes he would take the lad between his knees upon the driving seat, and Brian would feel very important, being " made over " by a real giant, like *Hop-o'-My-Thumb* in the old tale his father used to tell him.

On the outskirts of Dublin they came to an inn, a shabby place at which they were evidently habitual visitors. The landlord, a very little man in a nightcap, greeted them effusively. He told them he had been on the lookout for them for days. Their usual accommodations were all ready for them, he said—sweet, clean hay in the stable loft for them to sleep upon.

He looked askance at the Kilkenny Giant, who was evidently a stranger to him, and was quite taken aback when Ellen and Brian stepped down from the cart.

" Is it a new woman ye have?" he asked, looking at the harpist accusingly. " What's come o' the Whistling Hen?"

The harpist took the landlord aside, and explained the situation to him. There was much whispering and nudging and bargaining. The harpist displayed the little bag of pennies which he carried in the bosom of his waistcoat. It was finally arranged between them that Ellen was to have a room in the inn itself, like the real lady that she was.

"I thank you kindly," said Ellen, when the showman came to the back of the cart, where she was tying up her bundle, and told her that he had arranged accommodations for her; "but we mustn't put upon you for any further kindness. I'm off to seek my brother. You've been a real friend to me and the lad, and we'll never forget you for it—you, nor the others," she added, seeing the giant and Pips standing by with very long faces.

There were expostulations and protests, but Ellen was resolute. They had brought her to Dublin, and she was thankful to them; but as for her staying with the show, as they evidently expected, it was out of the question. She didn't tell them, but her inmost thought was that this vagabond life was a bad start for Brian on his road to being a scholar and a gentleman.

She had her brother's address tied in a bit of ribbon pinned to the bosom of her gown, together with a garnet brooch which had been her mother's, and a silver-gilt locket that her husband had bought her at a fair, when he was courting her. She showed the address to the landlord.

"Peter Wiley's cooperage?" he said. "Sure an' I know it well! It's a piece of a way—maybe as much as a mile up this road, and you come to a slaughterhouse. Ye turn there to the right, and the way is straight into the city itself. If ye keep askin' and go straight, ye can't miss Peter Wiley's."

It was hard to say good-by to her three good friends, especially with Brian making such a to-do about it. He clung to the Kilkenny Giant, kicking and screaming in revolt, the tears running down his cheeks.

"I'll go a bit of the way with you," said the giant. "Since he'll not leave go of me leg, maybe he'll come along with it!"

The boy, at that, left his hold of the giant's leg and ran toward the stables, whither the piebald horse had been led, looking very much surprised at being stabled after so many weeks of freedom. Brian ran to the end of the stall and screamed defiance at them. The old horse shied away from him, frightened by the uproar.

"I never knew he had it in him to behave in such a way," said Ellen, abashed. "He was always a good lad. Brian,' she said, peering at him from under the horse's legs, "have you forgotten your father—how he wanted you to be a scholar and a gentleman?"

"I want to be a giant!" wailed Brian.

It took a long time to persuade him to come out, and there had to be false promises of bringing him back again, and true promises of being allowed to spend his penny in Dublin; but at length they were on their way down the long road to the city.

IV

BRIAN carried the rush basket, which the harpist had filled to repletion, and Ellen had her bundle slung over her shoulder—just as they had started from Ballymoney, only now they were much heartened by the good food and companionship they had had along the way. The showmen stood at the door of the inn, and waved to them each time they looked back. When they had gone a good piece down the road, Ellen saw that the Kilkenny Giant had left his companions and was following them.

When they reached the slaughterhouse, and turned to the right, they found themselves upon a road on which the houses were closer and closer together as they went along. Ellen had never seen so many houses in a row, nor so many people. They were not in Dublin proper at all, but it seemed already a great city to her, and very confusing.

Glancing over her shoulder, she saw that the Kilkenny Giant was not far behind them and that some urchins had gathered at his heels. No wonder, she thought, striding the streets like a giraffe in underwear! She was ashamed of her pride as she quickened her pace to keep as far away from him as possible. He was a good, kind friend, but too striking to be seen with, walking the streets of Dublin. She hoped that Brian would not look behind and see him.

The boy, who seemed to have forgotten his grief in the many unaccustomed sights and sounds of the city, trotted along cheerfully enough, his eyes big with wonder.

"Is this America, Mother Machree?" he asked.

"No, Brian Dhu," she answered. "This is not America, but we're on the way to it, my boy!"

Ellen felt timid about asking questions. The farther they went, the closer the houses were. The road turned presently into a cobbled street, and there were many carts dashing about, and a great stir and noise on all sides, which confused her.

She paused at a street crossing, looking vaguely about, and suddenly found herself the center of a yelling, laughing mob. The Kilkenny Giant had caught up with them, the crowd at his heels.

"The cooperage is just a piece farther," he said. "The cooper lives in the big red house up beyont, and the shop is behint it. Go you with the boy alone," he added, with rare delicacy. "I'll hold these rapscallions at my heels."

He turned and executed a grave and unaccustomed caper for the edification of his followers, while Ellen scuttled across the street, dragging Brian, protesting, with her. The boy wanted to stay with the giant and hear the crowd laugh.

A sound of tapping, like a thousand woodpeckers at work, came from behind the big red house, where the name "Peter Wiley" was on a brass plate at the door.

It wouldn't do to be knocking at the front door, Ellen thought, for the house looked very grand to her, with curtains at the windows, and all—better than the squire's house at Ballymoney, by a long ways.

She opened a little gate by the side of the house, and went down a bare alleyway to the back. She passed into a large garden, beyond which there was a long, low structure, with rows of new barrels and kegs and wooden pails piled symmetrically at the front of it.

The tapping was almost frightening as she drew nearer. Then, as she came to the open door of the shop and looked in, the noise died away gradually down the long room, as one lad after another rested his mallet to gaze on the lovely face looking in at the door.

They were all young lads, with bare bodies, except for their pantaloons. There was Denny, the next to the last in the row, grinning with a dawning look of recognition in his gray eyes.

"Ellen! Ellen!" he shouted.

He jumped like a frog over the barrels and staves in his way, and caught her in his arms. Ellen wept with joy at the feel of the tight clasp. It was good, finding one of her own, and getting a glad welcome from him!

The apprentices, after the manner of youth the world over, fell to embracing one another in mock ecstasy. They thought Ellen was a sweetheart of Denny's. She looked young enough for it, though she was four years his senior.

"What's this? What's going on here?" a harsh voice behind them demanded.

A stern, hard-faced man confronted Ellen as she withdrew from Denny's arms.

"'Tis my sister, come from Ballymoney," shouted Denny, over the roar of the mallets which the apprentices had hastily resumed.

"Let her not come in work hours, then!" bawled Wiley, the cooper. "Let her go along with herself now!"

"I'll take me half holiday this day," pleaded Denny, "and do without for two weeks to come."

Wiley looked at him from under frowning brows, but he was always one to accept a bargain that was to his advantage.

"Along with you, then," he said. "See you be back by five o'clock, or you'll get no tea!"

Wiley strode into the shop with never a look at Ellen or the boy.

Denny hastily donned his shirt and jacket, which were hanging on a nail in the shop, and in a few moments the three of them were through the alley and out in the street, away from the noise.

They paused for a moment outside the gate, for Denny to become acquainted with Brian, and to realize that he was an uncle. He laughed delightedly at the wonder of it, and tossed the boy up in his strong arms. Then he took them to the back room of an alehouse on the corner, where they could talk in peace.

The Kilkenny Giant was nowhere in sight. Ellen was shamefacedly glad of that, and a bit regretful, too. She would have liked to thank him for his watchfulness over them.

There was much to talk of over the veal and ham pie and the mugs of ale which Denny ordered so grandly. Ellen thought he must have plenty, to be spending money like that; but she soon learned that it was all he had. It was the very last of the Christmas money which the cooper was bound by agreement to give the apprentices on that day. The lads got their bed and board, but nothing else through the long year; and Ellen soon realized that there was slight prospect of being helped to America by Denny's slim resources.

While they were talking, the door opened, and the Kilkenny Giant strode in. He had bought himself a secondhand greatcoat, which came a little below his knees. Except for his height, and the expanse of red tights between his boot tops and the end of the shabby coat, he looked more like a reasonable human being than before.

He was greeted with a shout of delight from Brian. In a moment he was introduced to Denny, who invited him to sit at the table with them—which he did, doubling up like a jackknife, and not looking so bad with the greatcoat hiding his thinness and the red tights under the table. Brian climbed upon his knees, and was very happy, though it was like sitting on two sharp fence rails.

The question of America was brought up. Denny was resourceful. He agreed with Ellen that America was the place for her and the lad, and he saw a way to getting her there. His apprenticeship would be ended in a few months, but he could bind himself for a term of years to Wiley with wages. Wiley would perhaps give part of the money in advance, to get a good trained man cheap.

Ellen refused this sacrifice at first, but Denny explained that he would bind himself somewhere—to Wiley or another, what matter?

He carried the whole thing off lightly, telling her that she could send him gold in payment, from America, where they said it could be picked up in the streets. His money, with interest, she could send him, in no time at all!

The Kilkenny Giant agreed with Denny. There were rare chances for a person who could get to America, he said.

And so the matter was arranged, and in three days Ellen and Brian were on a little ship, sailing out of Dublin Bay to Liverpool, on their way to the land of promise. Denny went back cheerfully to a hated servitude, remembering the look of gratitude and hope on his sister's face as she waved to him from the ship's rail.

Ellen stood there for a long time by the ship's railing, with Brian's hand held tightly in hers, and gazed at the diminishing shore until it grew small and far away. Then she turned and looked about her, where there were many rough people squatted upon the deck in groups, opening parcels of food, and handing black bottles about.

She raised her eyes to the deck above her head, and saw there a very tall man in a sailor's blue pants, which he did not need to roll up, as the wide flap of them came only to the calf of his legs. He was mopping the deck with a long-handled brush, and looking down at her the while, with something like a grin on his solemn face. It was the Kilkenny Giant!

"You?" she cried.

"Sure! I'm on me way to America," he shouted. "I'm going to see that felly by the name of Barnum!"

V

There was no gold to be picked up on the streets of New York—Ellen soon found that out. It was a hard place — harder than Ballymoney, because there she had friends, and when the great folks were at the castle there was always fine sewing to do and to be well paid for.

The little store of money which Denny had forced upon her, over the price of her passage on the ship, wouldn't keep them long, she knew, even in the very poor room on the top floor of the miserable tenement in which they lived. The Kilkenny Giant had found the place for her, and then had disappeared. It was more than three weeks since she had seen him. She felt very much alone and frightened in the big, busy city, where no one noticed her, or spoke a kind word to her, from morning to night.

The Emigrant Association had taken her name, and had promised to find sewing for her to do; but each day, when she went to the office, she was told that there was nothing for her as yet.

Slowly a disquieting conviction forced itself upon her—she must be a hired girl, as the harpist had predicted. There was a great demand for good strong girls from the old country. Michael wouldn't like it, could he look down—she knew that. He had always held himself, and her, too, far above even the servants at the castle, with all their fine airs and smart clothes; but there was no help for it.

She didn't believe, as the harpist had said, that there was no rising above it. It would be only for a short while, she thought, until she could save enough money to wait for more fitting employment. So she put her name down on the books of the Emigrant Association as an applicant for general housework.

There was an unforeseen difficulty about this, too. No one seemed to want a girl with a child to take in with her. She suspected that some of the housewives she saw didn't believe in the wedding ring upon her finger. They looked at her and the boy askance. Her striking beauty was against her, too. They made it very evident that they thought her a light woman who had been cast aside with her child.

She didn't look strong enough, either—not for the way people worked the hired girls in those days.

Every day they gave her names and addresses. Every day she trailed long miles over the city, starting out with high hopes in the morning, and returning unsuccessful and in despair at night. Nobody wanted her.

She began to be frightened. There seemed to be bad luck upon her, no matter which way she turned.

One morning, in the fourth week of her discouraging life in New York, as she was starting out once more to look for work—taking Brian with her, as usual, for she was fearful to leave him alone—she encountered the Kilkenny Giant upon the doorstep, just raising his hand to knock, as she opened the door.

She would scarcely have known him, except for the height of him. He was clad in a suit of butternut cloth, which must have been cut for him especially, as it fitted him all the way down, the trousers being drawn by a strap under his shoes. Upon his head he wore a high hat with a wide brim, and there was a muffler drawn close about his throat.

" Well, and how are you doin'?" he said calmly, as if he had left them the day before.

Stooping, he lifted Brian, who was clamoring for attention, to his shoulder. Brian clasped him tightly about the throat.

" Easy!" he said, flinching a bit. " There's a sore spot I still have on the neck of me. How are you doin'?" he repeated, looking down at Ellen.

" Not so well; but I see you are coming on grand, with your new suit and all."

" I've had a hard time — a very hard time," said the giant darkly. " Strange things has happened me. Will we go up to your place for a talk?"

" Of course! Come in," said Ellen.

She led the way up the stairs, the giant following, with Brian still seated upon his shoulder.

" I feared we had seen the last of you," she said, as they went into the little bare room at the very top of the house, where there were no windows, and only a gray light came through the dusty skylight above.

" I thought I had seen the last of meself," answered the giant gloomily, as he folded himself like a yardstick upon the edge of the bed.

" From the looks of your new suit and all, I was thinking maybe you'd met up with Barnum himself!"

" Yes—that's it! I met up with Barnum!" He sighed dismally. " I was showed off last night for the first time. For two weeks he had me laid by the heels with three sailormen sticking me with needles 'twould curdle your blood to look at!"

" What? Sticking you with needles?"

Ellen thought the poor man was out of his head.

" He said I hadn't the proper heft for a giant—like the Harpist o' Wexford told me long ago, but I wouldn't have the sense to believe him. It's the tattooed living skelington I am now. Bozo, from Brazil, it is I am!"

He looked ready to fall to weeping. Pulling the muffler slightly away from his throat, he displayed a bright butterfly fluttering daintily across his Adam's apple.

" The soreness is all gone," he continued, " except one spot by me ear; but I'm tellin' you I wouldn't go through it again, not for double the twenty dollars a week I'm gettin'."

" Oh, my!"

Ellen could find no further words to express her astonishment at the prodigious amount of twenty dollars a week and the method of obtaining it.

" There's scarce a inch of me not covered, and it 'll never come off—never so long as I live!" He seemed to take a gloomy satisfaction in his plight. " They've got me picture painted on the front of the museum, larger than life, and thinner, too!" A hint of pride crept into his voice at this. " Could the Harpist o' Wexford see that—me picture painted in the face of all Broadway to look at!"

" But you shouldn't have let them!" said Ellen. " To go through life with butterflies on you that will never come off!"

" Mr. Barnum said I was no proper giant, like I told you, but he was real took with the thinness and longness of me.

When he saw me stripped, he like to have laughed the head off him."

"I want to see the butterfly again," said Brian, pulling at the muffler.

"There's a snake on me chest, too," said the giant aggrievedly, as he took off the muffler and opened his shirt a bit to show it. "Did I know it was a snake while they were doing it, I wouldn't have had it; but now it's there, there's nothing to do about it. Anyways, it's not billed from Ireland I am. 'Tis from Brazil he says I come, and maybe there's snakes there, I shouldn't wonder."

The giant seemed very unhappy about the whole thing, but there was a curious pride about him, too, which made Ellen inclined to laugh in spite of her sympathy with him.

"What I came for is this," he said abruptly. "The half lady fell sick last night with the smallpox."

"The half lady?"

"She's a whole lady that sits in a place with looking-glasses about, and those that's outside can see no farther down than the middle of her, so she looks to be cut in half, as it might be. I thought maybe, if you'd come with me to see Mr. Barnum, he might be givin' you the chance to be the half lady."

Ellen looked at him wide-eyed, not clearly understanding.

"She must have good looks to her," he explained, "and must not be known in the city. He was thinking he'd have to send away for another one, but I tellt him to bide till he laid eyes on you, and he's waitin' for you."

"Oh, I couldn't! With people looking at me!"

"There'd be fifteen dollars every week in it for you."

Fifteen dollars! Enough to keep them grandly and send Brian to school, she thought.

"You have only to sit in the place with the looking-glasses, and smile and look pleasant when the crowd passes. The other one was a light trollop, and used to be passing the wink to the boys, but he wouldn't be asking that of you."

Fifteen dollars every week! It would give Brian his chance! It would be wicked, not fair to the child, to refuse it.

"Very well, then," she said, making up her mind at once. "A half lady, is it? If he'll have me, I'll be it!"

As they started out for their walk uptown to Broadway and Ann Street, there was but one thought in Ellen's mind—Brian could go to school now. She knew the very place for him! On Bank Street, it was—a neat little red brick house with a sign by the door which read:

Miss Van Studdiford's School for Little Ladies and Gentlemen.

That was the place for Brian, if Mr. Barnum consented to accept her as the half lady. It was there, no doubt, that the little ones were taught the ways of gentlefolk. It would be putting Brian on the way that his father had wished him to go—learning to be a scholar and a gentleman at one and the same time!

VI

Barnum's big museum was very frightening when they came to it. It was a huge structure with hundreds of windows, between which there were gaudily colored pictures of the wonders inside. Flags flew all along the top of it.

The giant pointed out his own representation with a strange mixture of pride and resentment. There he was between the Dog-Faced Boy and the Mermaid, but he was no longer the Kilkenny Giant—he was Bozo, the only living tattooed skeleton from Brazil!

Ellen could scarcely rest her eyes upon the picture. The tights had been bad enough, but now there was nothing on him at all save a small bit of cloth about his loins, and the highly colored tattooing sprawling all over him.

"It's too bad!" she said. "Suppose, now, he should want to cut off my legs for life! I wouldn't do it for twice the fifteen dollars. You should have stood out against him."

"A man must live," answered the giant gloomily. "Besides, he has a quick way about him, Mr. Barnum. Before you know it, there you are with the papers signed and all!"

They went around the corner to a little door at the back. There was a man there in a box. The giant strode past him grandly, with an air of authority, saying that he was taking his friends to see Mr. Barnum.

They went up two long flights of stairs and along a dark circular passageway, Ellen clutching Brian tightly by the hand. She tried to keep up with the long stride of the Kilkenny Giant, whose air of confidence seemed to desert him a bit as he knocked rather timidly upon a door, on which the name "P. T. Barnum" was emblazoned in letters at least a foot tall.

"Come in!" boomed a big voice.

There were two men in the office—one amazingly tall and broad, and the other amazingly short. The big man was seated at a large flat desk; the small one sat upon it, his legs crossed under him. They were Mr. Barnum and Major Tom Thumb, having a business conference.

"Oh!" shouted Brian delightedly. "Like Pips! Look! Like Pips!" He ran over to the desk. "Turn a flip-flap," he demanded.

The little man was very dignified. He climbed down from the desk by the aid of a chair, and stood looking up gravely at Brian—for the child was taller than he—with an odd look of offended dignity upon his chubby face.

"I don't turn flip-flaps, boy," he said in a high, childish voice; "but you may shake hands with me if you like."

Brian was abashed. He took the proffered hand timidly. The little man seemed very old to him.

Mr. Barnum laughed heartily.

"This is Major Tom Thumb," he said. "He's giving you for nothing what you'd have to pay fifty cents for out front." He turned and looked an inquiry at the Kilkenny Giant. "Well, Bozo?"

"It's the girl for the half lady," said Bozo, as we must now call him.

He thrust Ellen forward. She had been lingering, abashed, by the door.

"Ah! H-m!" Barnum looked keenly at Ellen. His bright brown eyes were piercing but kindly. "So you want to be the half lady, do you?"

"I'm needing the money, sir."

Ellen lifted her gray eyes to his face, her own cheeks suffused with a rosy blush. She looked very lovely.

"H-m! A real Irish rose!" exclaimed Barnum, beginning at once to make up a handbill in his mind. "Take off your shawl, my girl."

Ellen removed the small shawl from her head. Her hair was as black as a raven's wing, and had a hint of a wave in it. Little tendrils of curls were on her forehead and at the nape of her neck.

"You haven't stretched it!" cried Barnum to Bozo. "Beautiful, with the proper clothes! A real Irish rose! Eyelashes half an inch long! From the aristocracy of old Ireland! Kings! Brian Og!" he exclaimed incoherently, keeping his eyes upon Ellen, while he reached for the writing pad he had always at hand. "Bozo, my boy, it's a deal! When can you come?" he asked Ellen.

"Any time, sir. There's nothing to prevent me."

"I must have a few days for publicity. Suppose we say Friday afternoon—that all right?"

"Yes, sir, and thank you kindly. Will I have the fifteen dollars by the week, or how?"

"Every week, as sure as Friday comes around. That 'll do, Bozo. You've done me a favor I shan't forget."

Barnum nodded to them in dismissal, and fell upon the pad and pencil to frame up his advertisement of the Irish rose. They went out of the office without further words, Brian dragged by the hand and staring wide-eyed at Major Tom Thumb, who stared solemnly back at him.

There was a band playing out front as Bozo bade them good-by at the stage door. Soon he would have to be stripped and on view with the rest of the freaks. Ellen assured him that she knew her way back, every step of it; but before she went home there was something to do. Se would go to the school for little ladies and gentlemen, and arrange about Brian.

It was quite a long walk from the museum to Bank Street, and Ellen's courage and confidence began to desert her as she hurried along. She was very shabby, she knew that, and Brian's homespun smock, though neat and clean, was far from being in the style of dress worn by the more fortunate children of this new world.

They looked like immigrants, she thought. They *were* immigrants, for the matter of that!

She tried to brace her falling courage by the thought of the good blood that flowed in their veins, but it was a very frightened little woman who paused in front of the little red house, with a flutter in her throat and a sinking feeling about her heart. The sign at the door, which had been so reassuring to her before, now seemed a warning put there to bid her keep out. "Little ladies and gentlemen!" Would the schoolmistress be able to recognize Brian as a little gentleman, in spite of appearances?

Ellen bent to the child, fluffed out the curls from under his cap, and smoothed his dress with her hands. With the corner of her shawl she furtively wiped the tips of his dusty boots. Then, summoning all her courage, she gave a very gentle pull to the brass knob by the side of the door.

The door was opened presently by a neat maid in a cap and apron—a tight-looking little maid, with a pursed up mouth and a thin nose with a supercilious tilt to it.

"Could I see Miss Van Studdiford?" asked Ellen, her voice trembling.

"What do you want?"

The little maid's nose seemed to assume a higher tilt, in disdain of them; but Ellen looked the girl in the eye, and spoke with authority.

"I wish to speak with her."

"Well, I don't know. I'll see. You may come in."

The maid preceded them along the hall, and showed them into a prim parlor, where she bade them wait. Then she went upstairs, looking very doubtful and a bit puzzled at her own weakness in having admitted two such shabby visitors.

There was gilt-flowered paper upon the walls of the room, and several family portraits of painfully aristocratic aspect. An enormous walnut what-not filled one corner, and on its shelves was a collection of bric-a-brac, placed in exact rows. On the marble-topped center table there was a stuffed bird under a glass case, with some gilt-embossed albums laid precisely around it. Two tall pier glasses in gilt frames at each end of the room accentuated its size. It looked very grand and imposing to Ellen. She grew more and more apprehensive of the success of her errand as she waited.

Miss Van Studdiford was the last of a very old family, which had long prided itself upon its gentility, in spite of straitened means. By the time it came to her, the gentility and the straitened means had increased to such an extent that something genteel had to be done about it. Teaching children to be little ladies and gentlemen in the best Van Studdiford manner had seemed the obvious thing to do.

When the thin, angular schoolmistress at length came into the parlor, Ellen was almost overpowered by her appearance and manner. She advanced slowly, with her carefully practiced mincing step, which swayed her crinoline to just the proper degree. She carried a white handkerchief in her hands, which were crossed primly upon her middle. A large cameo brooch pinned the white lawn collar at her throat, and there was a little cap of rare old lace upon her head.

Ellen rose involuntarily and curtsied. Miss Van Studdiford inclined her head graciously, and seated herself gingerly upon the edge of a horsehair sofa.

"And what can I do for you?" she asked, her lips forming the words primly.

"It's the boy," said Ellen. "I'm wishing to have him educated."

She drew Brian from behind her chair. He was not a bashful child, as a rule, but something about the room and the appearance of the strange lady had quite taken him aback.

"He's a very beautiful little boy," said Miss Van Studdiford, with unaccustomed impulsiveness, and then she pulled herself up. "But, of course, handsome is as handsome does, you know."

She smiled, and, strangely, Brian felt drawn to her. He went over to the sofa and put out his hand to be shaken.

Miss Van Studdiford took the hand graciously, patted it a bit, and drew Brian to her side. He was a very appealing little lad. Most women wanted to cuddle him. There was a wide-eyed wistfulness in his look which seemed to call for care and affection. The schoolmistress was surprised by the strange emotion of motherliness he aroused in her tight little breast.

"Do I know you?" she asked, looking at Ellen.

"Know me? Not till now," replied Ellen, bewildered by the question.

"Your family, I mean."

"I haven't any family, now — only a brother in Dublin. I lost my husband a while back. 'Twas he that wanted Brian to be a scholar and a gentleman, and that is why I am bringing him to you."

Miss Van Studdiford coughed delicately and affectedly, and put her handkerchief to her lips.

"I fear you do not understand," she said. "I wish to cast no reflections, but I require social standing in my pupils. You see, I am responsible for the associations of my little charges."

"You mean you won't take Brian?"

Ellen's heart sank, and tears of disappointment rose to her eyes. Again Miss Van Studdiford uttered her embarrassed little cough.

"If you could bring me letters," she said, wondering at herself for making the suggestion.

"I haven't any letters," said Ellen, and then, desperately: "But I could bring you as much as twelve dollars, and maybe more, each week."

Miss Van Studdiford looked her surprise. Twelve dollars! That was an important sum to her! But she had her fixed standards, which could not be easily lowered.

"My charge is only eight dollars per week for boarding pupils, and four for day scholars, but they must be recommended by some one I know."

The collapse of her hopes was overwhelming to Ellen. The tears from her brimming eyes overflowed as she looked blankly at the schoolmistress.

Miss Van Studdiford was very uncomfortable. She found it distressing to have any one display such frank emotion in her prim parlor, where all emotion was firmly suppressed. The child was leaning against her, his hand at her cameo brooch, twisting it about to get a better look at it. Those small fingers at her throat gave her an odd feeling. They seemed to be clutching at her heart.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't mean to be unkind. You see, my rules—I have only the best families. I am pledged to my clients."

Ellen valiantly rose to the defense of her family.

"His father was a schoolmaster in Ballymoney, and as fine a gentleman as you could find. I haven't the education myself, but my own family could hold up its head with the best of them. However, it is not for me to force the child where he is not wanted."

Not wanted! It was difficult for Miss Van Studdiford to keep from drawing Brian within her arms and holding him there. He was leaning against her confidingly. Most of her pupils kept at a respectful distance from her. None of them loved her. She had never wanted any of them to love her. She was astounded and embarrassed by the desire she felt to keep this little one with her.

Ellen rose, went over to the sofa, and took Brian by the hand, to lead him away. He was reluctant to go. He pressed, warm and confiding, against Miss Van Studdiford's arm, seemingly fascinated by the cameo brooch at her withered throat.

"Look, Mother Machree!" he said. "It has a face on it, but no pretty red stones like yours."

"Come, Brian, come," said Ellen. "Bid the lady good day."

"Good day, lady," said Brian obediently, and he put up his face to be kissed.

The touch of those soft lips upon her cheek was a more moving appeal than Miss Van Studdiford could withstand.

"One moment," she said, as Ellen went toward the door. "It's most irregular, but perhaps, if you'd leave the child here, entirely in my care, I might reconsider."

"Give him up to you? Not to have the boy with me at night?"

"It would be the only arrangement that I could consider."

Suddenly it came to Ellen that this was the thing to be done. Of course! She would have to be away at night, being shown off as the half lady. She couldn't have Brian with her at the museum.

"Do you mean you would take him, then, did I give him up to live with you?"

"I think—yes," replied Miss Van Studdiford, who felt as if she were speaking in a strange hypnotic dream.

"And I could have him back when I wish?"

"Naturally."

"And you'd feed him and board him for the twelve dollars, and I could come and see him now and again?"

"You may come any time after sessions; but my charge is only eight dollars. I make no distinctions."

Brian looked, bewildered, from one face to the other. He didn't understand the situation entirely. Something momentous was being decided about him—he felt that; but his mother's face looked brighter than it had for days, and there was kindness in the other prim face, too, so he felt that everything was all right, somehow.

"I'll bring him to-morrow, and thank you kindly," said Ellen. "I suppose you'll want the money in advance?"

"It is usual, of course," replied Miss Van Studdiford.

Ellen was so full of gratitude and relief at the turn of events that she was scarcely conscious how she got out of the house, and was doubtful whether she had said a proper good-by to the schoolmistress.

As they went up the street, Miss Van Studdiford peeped after them through the lace curtains. She was astounded by her own impulsiveness. What had come over her, she wondered? What would people think if they knew? That woman in the patched skirt, with the shawl over her head, and the little boy with his golden head and wistful eyes! What had they done to her? What was it about them that had made her ignore the fixed rules of her ordered existence?

She shook her head in doubt and dismay. She felt that she had been foolishly impulsive.

VII

On the following Friday, when the wardrobe woman at Barnum's Museum was fitting Ellen into a spangled waist cut low at the neck, showing more of her shoulders than she liked, she had to think very hard of Brian, safe under Miss Van Studdiford's care, to force herself to go through with it.

"A scholar and a gentleman he'll be!" she said to herself, shutting her eyes tight to think it better. "A scholar and a gentleman, like his father wished! And me a half lady to be shown off for it! Well, it's done now and can't be helped, with my picture out at the front and all!"

She had seen her picture by the door of the museum that day, looking at it through the thick veil which Mr. Barnum had told her to wear day and night. It had looked strange to her, that picture, with great staring eyes and preposterous lashes which stuck up like bristles on a pig's back. She was represented as sitting upon a little swing, with no body to her at all below the waist! The Irish Rose, she was called, and under the picture she had read an account of her illustrious ancestry!

"A descendant of kings," it said. Well, it might be no lie at that. Her mother had often hinted at the like; but then, so had almost every other mother in Ballymoney. It was a common thing there to be descended from kings.

The wardrobe woman wanted to put paint upon her lips and cheeks, but this Ellen firmly refused. She had made no agreement to be painted like a harlot. Besides, she was wary of anything being put upon her, after what had happened to the Kilkenny Giant.

The first day was very hard. There was small need of color upon her cheeks when the crowd began to come and stare at her. Some of them rubbed their noses against the glass case and stood there for five minutes at a time, staring intently to see if she winked, or was only a wax figure.

A hoarse voice cautioned her from behind the curtain from time to time:

"Smile! Smile! Nod your head!"

This she did painfully, almost ready to burst into tears, but held back from that by the thought of Brian so safe at the school for little ladies and gentlemen.

The next day was not so bad, and as the weeks wore on she became reconciled to her position, but never easy in it. The bare shoulders and the spangled waist, under the eyes of the staring crowd, were hard to put up with.

The nights were bad, too, in the little room near the museum where she lodged. It was hard not having the boy to cuddle and talk with; but there was the blessed hour between five and six when she would hasten to the school and have Brian all to herself in the garden behind the red house.

Her heart swelled with pride when she thought of him in the new suit of kilts she had bought for him, and of the fine bow he had been taught, which he was always ready to show off to her. He was a great favorite at the school, and Miss Van Studdiford was making a pet of him. He liked her fine, he told his mother. Sometimes she gave him a jam tart up in her room, from her own table.

Brian, in fact, had quite taken the little old maid's heart by storm. She found herself wishing that he were her own. Sometimes she felt quite jealous, looking down from the back window and seeing him in the garden with his mother.

Ellen was a bit jealous, too—the child was so contented at the school; but that was only natural, having so much kindness and ease about him, and little ladies and gentlemen to play with. She rebuked herself severely when sometimes the thought came to her that she wished he missed her more than he did; but he loved her still. There was no mistaking the joy with which he greeted her.

Ellen was undergoing a disagreeable experience at this time, aside from her unrelished prominence as the half lady. She was beautiful, and there were some men who knew, only too well, that she was no half woman.

Young bloods came to the museum and stood in front of her case for a long time, trying to catch and hold her gaze through the glass. One or the other of them would be at the stage door, at times, and would follow her to her lodgings. She wondered how they knew it was she under the concealing veil. She didn't know that they had paid the doorkeeper for this information. She had been accosted several times, and one of the men had laid his hand upon her arm and tried to detain her upon the street.

There was a man in the museum company, too—a rich man, who had put money into Barnum's venture. He pestered her with attentions whenever he had the chance. She felt inclined to complain to Mr. Barnum. He wouldn't have it if he knew, but she was reluctant to bother him about the matter.

She told something of all this to Bozo, who thereafter accompanied her to her lodgings each night. He was a comfortable friend, Bozo. He never annoyed her in any way—never thought of her much, she surmised, being so bound up in his own depression and his own pride.

Marked for life, and yet a success! He didn't know how to look at the matter, but he considered his situation inwardly most of the time. He was homesick for Ireland, but would never go back, to have every one give him the laugh for the snakes and things upon him!

Barnum was continually changing his attractions, and Ellen trembled when she thought of the day when public interest in the half lady should cease. She had been there for three months. Her glass case was still well surrounded, but there were other and newer attractions, and she noticed that there was not so much jostling and shoving to see her, as there had been at first. She hoped that no one else had noticed that.

One afternoon the museum was more than usually crowded. There was a new attraction—the Siamese Twins. It seemed to Ellen that the whole city had turned out to see them. The crowd churned and writhed in the Hall of the Freaks.

Major Tom Thumb and his bride, and Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren, like four little dolls that had been cast aside, were looking peevish and neglected upon their platform. They hadn't sold a single photograph. They kept their exaggerated dignity, however. There was a crowd of school children in Mineral Hall. One could hear their high voices. When they came into the Hall of Freaks, the dwarfs would have their innings.

The Fat Lady and Bozo, shown upon the same platform for reasons of contrast, were frankly bored. Only a few stragglers, who could not get near the Siamese Twins, had paused for a glance at them.

In front of Ellen's case there was a family group, evidently from the country. They looked at her with round eyes, wondering audibly how she existed with so many necessary organs lacking, as there must be.

"The pity of it!" the mother of the family exclaimed. "And such a beautiful girl, at that!"

Ellen was inured to comments like these. Her thoughts, as usual, were with Brian. Just an hour more of this, and she would be free to see her son again! She fell into a pleasant reverie, quite detached from her surroundings.

The door from Mineral Hall was directly opposite the case in which she sat, and presently, as in a horrifying dream, she saw Miss Van Studdiford come through it, stepping daintily, like an old hen, with a flock of particularly well behaved chicks behind her.

The schoolmistress looked as if she were doing something of which her gentility did not quite approve. All the best schools had declared a half holiday for the purpose of visiting Barnum's Museum, where there were many instructive things for their pupils to see and hear. Miss Van Studdiford wished to give her charges every opportunity enjoyed by those of other schools, but she could not bring herself to approve of the museum. It seemed vulgar and theatric to her.

Ellen had had no warning of the intended visit. She had told Miss Van Studdiford nothing of the nature of her occupation. She had felt, in fact, that the little lady would strongly disapprove of it. It came to her, in a flash of dismay, that there was a very disagreeable experience before her—and before the schoolmistress, too, for the matter of that.

She had no time to think. Miss Van Studdiford came straight across the room, directly toward Ellen's case, and in a moment she and the children were standing in a tight little group before it.

Ellen's frightened eyes met Miss Van Studdiford's horrified gaze. Their faces grew white at the recognition. Then there was Brian in his little new kilts, pushing to the front. In a moment he lifted his eyes to his mother and saw her sitting there, seemingly cut in half, upon the little swing.

"Mother!" he cried. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Mother Machree!"

The child was so frightened that he looked as if he were going into a convulsion. His cry was a pitiful shriek.

Ellen stood up in the face of all the people, and ran through the curtain at the back and out to him. A strange figure she was in the old patched skirt with the spangled waist above it!

VIII

There was an amazed silence for a second, and then a shout of laughter went up. The crowd surged from the platform of the Siamese Twins, and people hurried in from the other rooms to see what it was all about. Ellen found herself the center of a shrieking, howling mob. Men and women hung on to each other, scarcely able to stand for laughing, and described the ridiculous incident to newcomers, amid shrieks and howls. Even the freaks were doubled with mirth upon their platforms.

An attendant dragged Ellen and Brian through the laughing mob, to a passageway behind the show cases, and up the stairs to Barnum's office. Ellen scarcely realized what she had done, being bewildered by the shouts and laughter and absorbed in her efforts to soothe Brian, whose grief and fear would not abate.

Mr. Barnum was very severe, at first, when he was told what had happened.

"Artists," he said, "should never let their private feelings interfere with their public duties. It's too bad, my girl. You've lost a good job by not being able to control yourself."

Ellen could find nothing to say in her defense.

Suddenly, as the humor of the situation came to him, Mr. Barnum began to laugh. He took up his writing pad, at once determining to get ahead of the public on the joke. He would tell them the whole thing was planned for their amusement. Fortunately it was the 1st of April. Fine! Leave it to him to turn the happening to his advantage!

He was a kind man. He gave Ellen two weeks' wages over what was due her, but he told her that it was all up with the job, for he would never dare to show a half lady again.

"That isn't the worst of it," thought Ellen, as she went away from the museum with Brian. "What am I to say to Miss Van Studdiford?"

She went at once to the school.

Miss Van Studdiford was lying upon her bed, vinegar and brown paper upon her forehead, her face drawn with anguish. Her little world was toppling to its fall, she thought. Her patrons would take their children away when they heard that she had placed the child of a public mountebank among them.

She wouldn't see Ellen. She couldn't bear the thought of her, or of the boy, either, for the moment. She sent down word that Ellen was to take Brian away with her.

As Ellen turned sadly away with the boy, she felt that Miss Van Studdiford was right to be angry with her. She shouldn't have concealed what her occupation was. She had been wrong, and had spoiled Brian's chances forever!

After a few days, in which she sought employment vainly, Bozo came to her again, like a protecting Providence. He brought good news. Mr. Barnum had not forgotten the Irish Rose. He had recommended her to a very fine lady, as nurse for her children. He had vouched for Ellen, glibly framing up a story in which there was no hint of her adventure as the half lady.

"It's a rare chance to live in a fine house, with plenty of the best to eat, and twelve dollars a month besides," said Bozo. "Will ye take it?"

"Would I? And why not? It's a gift from Heaven!"

"Well"—Bozo looked a bit uncomfortable—"there's more to it. You'd have to be puttin' the boy somewheres. They'd not take you with the boy—maybe not, if they knew you had one at all."

Put Brian somewhere! Ellen had heard no more than this.

"There's charity schools," said Bozo, looking away from her.

"Charity schools! Michael's son in a charity school! Never!"

"Mr. Barnum was tellin' me they had good care and all," said Bozo, answering the proud flush which rose to her face.

"Never! Never! We'll starve together first, me and the lad!"

She drew Brian to her side and held him closely.

"I thought maybe you'd be lookin' at it that way," said Bozo. "It wouldn't be any harm to see the lady, anyways. Here's her name and the place she lives, written by Mr. Barnum himself, and she's expectin' you."

He handed her a slip from Barnum's famous writing pad, scrawled all over in his big hand.

"What's the good of going at all, if I must give Brian up?"

"I'll not be given up," said Brian. "I'll stay with you, Mother Machree!"

At that moment there came a timid knock at the door. Seeing Ellen too much distressed to answer it, Bozo strode over to the door and opened it. He was greeted by a little shriek of dismay.

Miss Van Studdiford stood in the doorway, looking up at him, frightened by his size. She grasped her crinoline in her hands and started back, as if to run down the stairs again; but Brian had seen her.

"Miss Van! Miss Van!" he shouted.

This was the name he had given her from the first, not being able to manage the full patronymic. He ran out into the hall and greeted her enthusiastically, pulling her into the room. She squeezed herself against the doorway as she came in, looking very much afraid of Bozo, who, with rare tact, went out at once, closing the door after him.

"Have you a jam tart? Did you bring me a jam tart?" asked Brian.

"No, deary. No, but I will. There will be jam tarts!" Miss Van Studdiford murmured incoherently, looking at Ellen, who had risen and was staring at her, expecting she knew not what discomfort from this surprising visit.

The little schoolmistress had come to reproach her, of course, she thought. She had brought shame upon the school. Ellen trembled a bit as she curtsied and wiped a chair with her apron for the little lady to sit upon.

Miss Van Studdiford seemed strangely choked with emotion. Brian's greeting her with such joy meant very much in her loveless existence. He clung to her hand and leaned against her. No child had ever done that before.

"I'm sorry," stammered Ellen. "I'm sorry things happened as they did. I wouldn't have brought shame upon you, with your being so good to my little boy and all."

"But you didn't," said Miss Van Studdiford. "No one knows. It was most fortunate."

She explained that the story of the April fool hoax that Mr. Barnum had spread about the city had made no mention of her school. It was fortunate, too, that her little pupils had been so bewildered by the uproar that they had not clearly realized what had happened. She had hurried them away, and there had been no harm done at all. No one knew!

"Then I am happier than I've been for days," said Ellen. "With my own worries, I was holding yours, too. I feared it might have brought harm to the school. How ever did you find us here?"

Miss Van Studdiford spoke in a hushed voice:

"I went there. I went to the museum myself. A man at the door told me where I might find you. I would never have done such a thing, but I kept thinking—" She passed her mittened hand caressingly over Brian's bright head. "Such a bright mind, such a little gentleman! It seemed a pity. As the twig is bent, so will the tree incline, you know."

"You are going to take him back again?" cried Ellen hopefully.

"It might be arranged."

Miss Van Studdiford pursed up her mouth and tried to look very businesslike.

"I have just had a position offered me," said Ellen, "though not enough, perhaps, to pay you. It's but twelve dollars by the month, but I'll have my board, and I can give you all of it—and more, perhaps, if I can find sewing to do at nights."

"What sort of a position is it?" asked Miss Van Studdiford, looking more or less apprehensive.

"It's to take care of a lady's children."

Miss Van Studdiford flushed. She wasn't quite sure whether this was going up or down in the social scale. From a half lady in a museum to a nurse girl! A servant's child among her aristocratic charges! It had to be thought about! But she wanted Brian more than anything she had ever wanted in her life.

"I won't be a hired girl long," said Ellen. "I'll work out of it—you'll see! Soon I'll be able to pay you more."

"It isn't the remuneration," said Miss Van Studdiford; "but—oh, dear me, it's very difficult!"

"Am I going back to play with Ariana

DePeyster and Bobby Roosevelt?" cried Brian eagerly. "Mother Machree, am I going back to school? I want to go!"

"You want to leave me, Brian?" Ellen asked sadly.

"But you'll come every day to play in the garden! It's pretty there — not like this place!"

How cruel children can be with their truthfulness and self-seeking!

"Would you take him again?" asked Ellen.

Miss Van Studdiford looked uncomfortable. There was something she wanted to propose, but the words would not come easily.

"Is it my being a hired girl would prevent it?"

"If my clients should know, it would be awkward. I thought perhaps—would you let me adopt him?"

She spoke in a small voice, frightened by her own suggestion.

"No! No!" cried Ellen. "Give him up to you? Never! Never!"

"I know. I—of course not!" Miss Van Studdiford rose, trembling a little. "I was only thinking—the child's interests—"

She moved toward the door.

"Wait!" Ellen's voice was muffled. She scarcely knew what she said. "Give me a day to think. Something may happen. I'll see you to-morrow."

"Very well. Of course you wouldn't. I didn't think you would. I'm sorry; but, you see, it would be the only way in which I could consider taking him."

"I'll come to see you to-morrow," said Ellen dully.

"We'll come to see you to-morrow, Miss Van—to-morrow!" shouted Brian joyfully.

He ran to her where she stood by the door, and lifted his lips to be kissed.

As Miss Van Studdiford leaned toward him, she had an impulse to clasp him in her arms and bear him away in spite of everything; but she went out silently, walking with her little mincing step, hiding all emotion carefully, and pulling down her veil, so that no one in the street should recognize her, coming from that poor place.

IX

Ellen slept not at all that night. She sat by the bed, watching the candlelight flicker over her son's face as he lay peacefully sleeping. She was trying to see her way, her duty. Piece by piece, she was trying to tear every shred of self from her bosom.

She couldn't think it was best to give Brian up entirely. What love and care would make up to him for the lack of a mother's guiding hand? But then, what an advantage to him to be there with Miss Van Studdiford, learning to be a scholar and a gentleman, as his father had wished!

She fell asleep in the gray morning on her knees, her cheek upon the worn coverlet, with Brian's hand beneath it.

Early that day a note came from Miss Van Studdiford, brought by a boy, who said he had been told to wait for an answer. He stood by the door, whistling through his teeth and staring speculatingly at Brian, who stared back at him.

The note said:

> I will take Brian if you will agree not to see him here during your proposed occupation. I am sure you will understand my motive in making this stipulation. We can arrange for you to see him outside of the school. If agreeable to you, Brian may be sent by the messenger, who is the neighborhood "boots," and thoroughly reliable. He has the fare for the stage, should you decide to send Brian with him.

This was a reprieve, for there was no word of adoption. Ellen felt a glow of gratitude to Miss Van Studdiford. How good she was! How fond of the boy!

Having Brian well taken care of would give his mother a chance to look about. Soon she would find an occupation which would be more pleasing to the schoolmistress. It would be no time at all, she thought, when she could make a home of her own, and have Brian back again.

She walked to the Broadway stage with them, Brian's hand clasped in hers, and the boy whistling behind them. Brian skipped along, delighted to be going back to school.

Ellen watched the lumbering stage as it bore him away. She watched until it was out of sight.

"It is only for a time," she kept assuring herself.

Nevertheless, her heart was heavy as she turned back and went in the direction of Washington Square, where the lady lived to whom Mr. Barnum had recommended her.

The house she sought was a very large one, square and high and rich-looking. There was a garden at its side, which, she could see through the grilled gate, ran a long way to the back.

She pulled the shining brass knob at the gate, and heard the faint tinkle of a bell somewhere in the house. A negro came up the brick walk and opened the gate. Ellen timidly told him her errand. She had never quite recovered from her fear of black people, having never seen one before landing in America.

This one seemed very pleasant, however. He grinned at her reassuringly, and led her through the garden to the back door, and through the kitchen, where there were more black people, to the servants' dining room, where he bade her wait while he informed Mrs. Cutting of her coming.

It was quite half an hour before a white woman, in a frilled cap and apron, with snappy black eyes and a strange accent to her speech, came and led Ellen upstairs to Mrs. Cutting's boudoir, where that lady was at breakfast.

Seeing her in a pink *peignoir* with a lacy cap and ribbons, seated in a huge puffed chair, with a shining silver service before her, Ellen was much impressed. Mrs. Cutting looked like a queen, she thought.

"How do you do?" said the lady, pleasantly enough, but a trifle haughtily.

Ellen was too much abashed to speak. She bobbed a little curtsy. Mrs. Cutting did not ask her to sit down.

"This Mr. Barnum told my husband that you are from Ireland, of a good family?" she said.

There was a faint note of interrogation and disappointment in her voice. Ellen looked very shabby.

"Yes, ma'am," she replied meekly.

"I hope you haven't a brogue. I can't let the children acquire a brogue."

"Not when I am careful," said Ellen, speaking very primly.

"Well, be careful all of the time, then. I understand that you are the widow of a professor or something, and that you haven't been employed in domestic service before?"

Ellen inclined her head, still too much abashed to speak.

Mrs. Cutting looked at her for a moment in silence, a trifle petulantly.

"Oh, dear! It's most annoying, this changing! Nurse is going to be married. I'm sure she had a comfortable home here. Well! Well! We'll try you for a fortnight. Simone! Simone!" she called, to the Frenchwoman, who had gone into the bedroom, and who came to the door at her summons. "Show this woman up to the nursery, and tell nurse to instruct her in her duties. Tell Joe I shall want the landau at eleven o'clock."

Ellen followed the Frenchwoman out of the room, feeling that she had impressed Mrs. Cutting very unfavorably. It was true, she had. Mrs. Cutting was annoyed with the whole thing. Her husband had such queer acquaintances—this Mr. Barnum, for instance! Why insist upon her taking a nurse upon his recommendation, simply because he had told her husband a tale of undeserved misfortune? The woman wasn't going to do at all, but she would have to give her a trial. Mr. Cutting's word was law in that house.

The fortnight had not passed, however, before Mrs. Cutting found that she had made a mistake in her first judgment of Ellen. The woman was a treasure — so quiet, so capable, so refined. The children took to her at once. Before a month had passed they adored her.

Ellen didn't measure her duties. She was willing to help in any household emergency. It seemed that she was always substituting on some maid's day out. Silently and unobtrusively she grew day by day in the estimation of the whole family. Mr. Cutting rather plumed himself upon having found such a treasure. Even Mrs. Cutting sometimes dropped the formal "nurse," and called her by her name.

That lady had occasional spells of bad headaches. Before long it was Ellen for whom she called, to soothe her brow, and to sit beside the bed and fan her until she fell asleep.

Every fortnight Ellen had a day out, and Miss Van Studdiford would bring Brian to a little unfrequented park in Greenwich Village. Here they would have two precious hours together, while the schoolmistress sat on a bench at a little distance and watched them jealously.

"Why don't you come to our house, Mother Machree?" Brian often asked. "There's a swing in the garden. You could swing me."

"But it's fine here, Brian. Isn't any place good when we are together?"

"Yes," Brian would reply, a bit doubtfully; "but I like it better in our garden."

Then, seeing a shadow upon his mother's face, he would put his arms about her neck and kiss her again and again, as if in apology for having hurt her.

Watching from her bench, Miss Van Studdiford would feel a pang when she saw this. Brian was fond of her, but not in that way! Not enough!

A year passed by, and slowly the conviction forced itself upon Ellen that what the harpist had said—so long ago, it seemed—was only too true. Once a servant always a servant!

She saw no way of bettering her position. Every hour of the day was taken up by her numerous duties. At night she sewed for Brian. Everything he wore was fashioned by her skillful fingers. Every penny of her wages went to his keep. Mrs. Cutting supplied her nurse's uniform, and she needed nothing else for herself.

Her secret meetings with Brian, and Miss Van Studdiford's constant apprehension that they would be seen together, began to force a feeling of inferiority upon her. She was a detriment to her own child. He would be ashamed of her when he grew up, she began to think. She would be a millstone about his neck. A servant's child!

Something must be done about it.

One Sunday, as she was taking her little charges to Sunday school, she encountered Miss Van Studdiford upon the same errand, with her boarding pupils in a sedate line behind her. Brian was walking with the schoolmistress, who held him proudly by the hand. When he saw his mother, he uttered a glad cry of greeting, and tried to pull away from Miss Van Studdiford.

The children stared, and the schoolmistress hastened her steps, almost dragging Brian along. Ellen could hear his wailing cry of rebellion as they turned the corner.

The Cutting children had been curious about the incident. They had wanted to know who was the little boy who had called "Mother Machree" after her.

Ellen hated to lie. She would have liked to tell them proudly that the boy was her son; but she remembered her promise to Miss Van Studdiford, and put them off with some vague murmur about the child mistaking her for some one else.

The following day she received a note from the schoolmistress—one of a series which had been hinting that the present state of things could not continue. For Brian's sake, they must make some permanent arrangement. Miss Van Studdiford's former notes had hinted delicately and obliquely at the subject of adoption; but in this one she came out with it flatly. She didn't mean to be cruel. She had come to regard Brian as her own, and to fear for his future.

Ellen could not bring herself to answer the note at once. If she refused the demand—for it was a demand now, no longer a veiled suggestion — she saw the consequences with painful distinctness. She would be back where she had started—she and Brian in some miserable room, face to face with the heartbreaking struggle for existence; and Brian's chances would be lost forever!

The thought came to her to confide in Mrs. Cutting. She knew that her services were highly valued by her mistress, and perhaps she would be allowed to bring Brian there. He was a good child. She could have him in the room with her. They would scarcely know he was in the house.

But her clear vision saw only too well the selfishness of this idea. She would be happy in having him with her, but how about Brian? A servant's child! Creeping about, silent and repressed, seeing more fortunate children pampered and groomed and taught, growing servile, perhaps, and boot-licking for odd pennies! No! No! It was not to be thought of!

She had no friend to whom she could go for advice or help. Bozo had left Barnum's Museum, and was traveling with a small circus in the West. He had written to her once, and there was a definite farewell between the lines of his letter. Bozo had tact. He recognized her as a gentlewoman with ambition to better herself in life, and he knew that his acquaintance was of no advantage to her.

She eagerly scanned the advertisements in the papers, and applied for several positions which seemed promising and of a more dignified character than her present employment; but there were meager chances in business for a woman in those days. There were none at all for Ellen, with her lack of training. Domestic service was the only thing she was fitted for. It was useless for her to try to rise above it!

So at length Ellen made the great surrender. Brian McHugh became Brian Van Studdiford, hard and fast, by law, and their meetings ceased, so that he might be weaned from the memory of her. Ellen stipulated, however, that no one but she was to pay for his education and upbringing. Miss Van Studdiford accepted this condition gratefully enough. Her school brought her a bare subsistence, and Ellen's help was necessary, if Brian was to have equal advantages with the other children.

It was not so easy to wean Brian from the memory of his mother. There were times when he cried for her, and would not be comforted; but as the months went on and the years, the memory of her began to grow dim. After a while, without being told in so many words, he was given to understand that his mother had died, that she would never come back to him again.

X

One fine autumn day in the year 1863, a young man strode happily up Broadway, looking very fine indeed in a spick-and-span-new uniform. He was a lieutenant of the Tenth New York Regiment, which had not yet seen active service.

Incongruously, and in despite of regulations, he carried a small round bouquet covered with tissue. He carried it proudly. He was going to see his sweetheart, and didn't care much who knew it.

He was followed by sympathetic glances. It was evident that here was a young soldier in love, and a handsome, well set-up young soldier, who might be sure of his welcome wherever he was going.

He spoke to many people along the way, being well known in the city and received among the best there. He was the adopted son of old Miss Van Studdiford—a distant relation of hers, it was understood. His friends predicted that he would have a great future. Before the start of the war he had already made his mark as a lawyer. He was in Judge Deems's office, and it was said that when the present unpleasantness was over, he would be offered a partnership in that important law firm.

But the happiest circumstance in this young officer's life was that the opposition which the fashionable Cuttings had shown to his courtship of their daughter was gradually wearing away. The only objection they had had to him was his lack of fortune, and even they could see that this would be mended shortly. With Judge Deems to help him, he would go far.

Strangely, as the young man strode happily along, he was not thinking exclusively of his sweetheart. Part of his thoughts were with the little old woman who had stood at the door of their home on Bank Street, and had watched him so fondly and anxiously as he went up the street.

How good she had been to him always, he thought! Dear Aunt Van! What immense sacrifices she had made for him! How delightful it was that he was beginning to repay her!

He would pay her more and more as time went on, he thought proudly. She would have her carriage and pair with the best of them, before he was many years older! By George, he would begin to call her "mother" that very day, as she had always wanted him to do.

Mother! Something teased at the back of his mind. Why had he been so reluctant to give Aunt Van that name? She had been more than a mother to him. He remembered his own mother vaguely, like a beautiful dream. A beautiful, sorrowful dream! It was that dream, of course, which had kept him from calling Aunt Van "mother."

He was sorry that he had been so stubborn about it. He would try the new name upon her that night, he decided. He grinned as he imagined the look which would come to the anxious old face when he spoke the word she had always wanted to hear.

There was a pleasant stir and excitement in the air. The Stars and Stripes were flying from every shop front and house. Bands played. There were the sounds of marching feet and rolling drums as companies in new blue uniforms were being drilled upon the streets and squares.

New York was in the war in earnest. Gone were the days when the "peace at any price" men had kept the city in a state of ferment and dissatisfaction; when powerful interests had used every means at their disposal to force the government into some compromise, *any* compromise, which would lead quickly to an adjustment of the differences between the North and South.

As the young officer skirted Washington Square, he looked with envy toward the barracks established there for the accommodation of troops passing through New York from the North and East on their way to the front. He was impatient at being kept in the city upon police duty. He feared the war would end without his having been in it at all.

The Cutting family still lived in the old house on the north side of the square. They had not joined the hegira of the fashionable folk to the hideous "brownstone fronts" on Fifth Avenue, but were well content in the spacious red brick house with its large garden behind it, and its broad, lavender-tinted windows looking out upon the park.

The young man ran eagerly up the steps and pulled the bell vigorously. In a moment the door was opened by old Joe, the butler, who greeted him with a delighted grin.

"Yes, sir, cap'n," he said. "Miss Edith ain't only in—she's waitin'."

He chuckled and nodded his head toward the front drawing-room.

The young man didn't wait to be announced. He went across the broad hall to the drawing-room, where Edith was busy rolling fine linen into bandages. She had been peeping through the curtains, watching for him to come up the street. Seeing him, she had hastily run across the room and seated herself before a small table, upon which her work was spread. She was breathing a little quickly, but she tried to call up a look of welcoming surprise.

"Oh, is that you, Brian?" she said. "Is it really four o'clock?"

"It's ten at night from the way I feel," said Brian, coming toward her as she rose, and taking her two hands in his. "I thought the day would never end. I hoped you'd feel the same way, after last night."

Edith dimpled.

"I did, too," she confessed; "but I mustn't make you conceited!"

He kissed her upon the cheek. These little flying kisses were all he had had, as yet. Even last night, when she had confessed that she loved him, his lips had only been able to touch the tip of her ear. Girls had to be wooed in those days. There was no meeting a man halfway, or perhaps three-quarters, as is the fashion now.

Brian presented his bouquet. It was of moss roses and forget-me-nots. They knew the language of flowers, these two, and Edith laid her lips upon the blossoms, blushing at the sentiment they expressed. He kissed her again, this time as near her lips as the little dimple at their corners. She ran away from him, laughing, and pulled the bell cord for a maid to bring a vase and water for the flowers.

Brian followed her, and was about to win another kiss, when they heard footsteps in the hall. Edith laughingly pushed him away, and he retired hastily to the window, where he stood looking out.

In a moment a woman appeared in the doorway—a little bent woman in a black gown and a plain white apron.

"Oh, Ellen!" cried Edith. "I didn't mean to trouble you."

"All the maids have gone with your mother to the Soldiers' Rest, so I—"

She paused. Brian had turned from the window, and it was as if something in his appearance had struck further words from her lips. She retreated toward the door.

"I only wanted a vase for the flowers," said Edith, showing the bouquet proudly. "Brian, this is Ellen, my old nurse." She put her arm affectionately about the little woman. "Ellen, this is my—this is Lieutenant Van Studdiford."

Ellen looked very white. Her hand trembled as she took the flowers from Edith, but she managed something between a bow and a curtsy toward Brian, who was staring at her with a strange, puzzled look in his eyes. He said nothing, not even a conventional greeting.

There was a moment's odd silence. Then Ellen turned and went from the room.

"Why, Brian," said Edith, "I don't think you were nice at all. That's Ellen. She's been with us all my life, and longer, for she nursed Richard and Emma, too. We think of her as one of the family. I hope you're not a snob!"

"Why, no—what an idea! I was just—I thought I'd seen her some place before."

Edith pouted a bit.

"You might have shaken hands with her or said something!"

"I'm sorry," said Brian. "I will the next time. It's odd. She made me think of something that I couldn't quite get the meaning of."

Meanwhile Ellen, in the pantry, was leaning against one of the shelves, steadying herself, before she reached for a vase in which to put the flowers. She had felt that the meeting with her son must come some time, ever since Edith had confided in her, several months ago, about her love for Brian; but she had hoped somehow to avoid it.

How mad she had been, she thought, to stay on for a moment after Edith told her! There was danger to Brian's happiness in her presence in that house. The startled, half recognizing look in the boy's eyes had frightened her. If he should see her again and again, as he must if he married Edith, might he not piece together scraps of childish memories and see the truth whole?

For his sake she knew she must go away. She must leave the only home she had known for more than twenty years. She didn't mind the sacrifice for herself, but what was she to say to the Cuttings? She was regarded there as a fixture, as the main prop of the household. How could she explain her sudden leaving?

Mrs. Cutting could never get on without her. She was home-keeper, administrator, confidante, backbone to every person in that house. She loved them all, but she couldn't stay there and run the risk of their finding out that Brian Van Studdiford was Brian McHugh, the son of the poor hired girl who had come to them many years ago in her patched gown and ragged shoes—a poor ignorant Irishwoman, at whom they laughed lovingly at times, because of her saving ways and the slight brogue that still clung to her tongue. To have the truth known would be to pull down all the bright edifice she had builded about Brian so painfully and laboriously during the long years.

She put the flowers into a vase, and gave it to old Joe, to take back to the drawing-room. Then she went upstairs to her own little room upon the top floor, to think things out.

How handsome he had looked, her boy, in his new uniform! Handsomer even than when she had seen him last, standing in his cap and gown, to receive his diploma at the university. She had sat far back in the auditorium, a shabby, old-fashioned figure in the gay crowd. She had seen Miss Van Studdiford seated up in front, just behind the students, among their parents and friends. She had not cared about that, because she knew that it was not Miss Van Studdiford who had accomplished the miracle of placing Brian among those children of fortune. Every bit of his way Ellen had paid—paid by saving and scrimping and being thought close by the open-handed Cuttings.

They had often chaffed her about it. Sometimes they called her " Mrs. Midas," and asked her what she was going to do with all the money she was hoarding? She had never had a new gown to her back these many years. She had performed miracles in the remaking of hand-me-downs from various members of the family. In her earlier years she had even made slippers from bits of carpet, to save her one pair of shoes, which she was obliged to wear when she went out into the park with the Cutting children.

She didn't wonder that they thought her stingy. How surprised they would be if they knew that she had saved nothing for her old age! Her wages had been raised from time to time, and frequently Mr. Cutting had invested small sums for her, much to her advantage. Doubtless they thought she was very well fixed.

There was her brother Denny, too. Long since she had paid his loan, with interest. He thought her rich, and had recently written to ask a loan for one of his boys to go to college. She would have to refuse him. If it were not for the war, she might have managed it; but it would be months now before Brian would be earning again. She felt that it would not be fair to him to spare a penny to any one else.

It would be hard to leave the Cuttings, but she was well and strong. There was some place in which she could make her living. It must be in New York, however. She didn't want to relax her watchfulness over Brian.

There had never been a time in all the years when she had lost touch with him. Many a long afternoon she had lingered across the street from the little red brick house, hoping to get a glimpse of his face at a window, or perhaps to see him come out with the other children for a sedate walk to Washington Square, where they were sometimes allowed to play.

She had fashioned his life after the pattern of that led by the little Cutting children. When they had velocipedes, Brian had one also. When the French *mademoiselle* came to them, Brian was sent to M. Thébaud, in Ninth Street. He had been in the same dancing class with them at Signor Bellini's; and so on, step by step, she had given him equal advantages with the children of the rich.

Miss Van Studdiford had always carefully carried out Ellen's wishes, expressed in veiled notes which came to her from time to time. Poor Miss Van Studdiford! She had not dared to disobey in the slightest particular, fearing that Ellen would appear in person, and make some claim upon Brian's affection and obedience.

She need not have feared that. Once having made the great surrender, Ellen stood firmly by her agreement.

Miss Van Studdiford's school had been

long abandoned. It had gradually died out with the progress of the city, and for more than twelve years she and Brian had lived entirely upon Ellen's earnings. The schoolmistress felt uncomfortable when she thought of this, but she thought of it as little as possible. It was a thing to be ignored, since it served Brian. The young man, on his part, understood that Miss Van Studdiford had a small income, upon which they lived so meagerly.

Ellen pondered long and painfully. If Brian were coming into the family, she must leave it; but she decided to wait until the last moment, and to be very careful to keep out of his way.

XI

As Brian went back home through the dim twilight, under the happiness at his heart and the heady thrill in his brain something kept stirring — something sad, something disquieting. Edith had been sweeter, more yielding, than ever before, but there was an ache somewhere.

Memories came of his childhood—very vague memories of a time when, it seemed, he had lived amid crowds and with strange people—giants and ogres and a little man who grimaced. There was also a memory of an apple tree in bloom, and soft arms about him, in a garden. It was Aunt Van's garden, of course, but the arms had been his mother's.

It was strange, he mused, how long a time it had been since he had given a thought to his mother; but then Aunt Van had always discouraged his thinking of her. That wasn't right. A man should think of his mother at times, even if she were long dead.

Miss Van Studdiford was waiting at the parlor window. Brian smiled indulgently when he saw that the prim lace curtains were drawn slightly aside. She always seemed to be waiting there, watching for him. He had never given her any cause for anxiety, and yet she was always anxious, always troubled, he thought, by some fear of what might happen when he was away from her.

She met him in the hallway when he opened the door. Her strained old face looked a question.

"It's all right, Aunt Van," he said. "Look at me! I'm an engaged man—at least if Mr. Cutting consents when I see him to-morrow!"

A pang went through Miss Van Studdiford's heart. Engaged! Of course, she had known it must come some day. She tried to be happy about it for his sake, but to share his affection was very hard to her. She knew only one way in which to love, and that was to hold tightly, not to give.

"You shouldn't have spoken to her, Brian, until you'd seen Mr. Cutting."

"Oh, Aunt Van! The world's moving! We don't do things that way any more."

"In my young days," began Miss Van Studdiford, in her primmest schoolmistress manner, "girls never allowed a man to guess at their sentiments until the parents had been consulted."

Brian laughed, and, putting his arm about her, looked down at her boyishly.

"Your young days couldn't have been very thrilling," he said, and then added bashfully: "Mother!"

Miss Van Studdiford started, and looked into his face. Then she leaned against him, trembling, as he led her back into the little parlor. How long she had wanted to hear that name upon his lips, and how guilty she felt now that he had uttered it!

"What made you call me that, Brian?" she asked, as he seated himself upon the sofa by her side.

"Because you've been a mother to me, and I'm so happy to-night! Besides, I've been thinking a bit of my other mother."

Miss Van Studdiford stiffened and drew slightly away from him.

"Of what did she die, Aunt Van?" he asked, slipping unconsciously into the familiar form of address, "and when?"

Miss Van Studdiford flushed—a painful flush on those old, withered cheeks.

"Don't let us speak of it, Brian. Why bring up unhappy memories?"

"But I want to talk of it," persisted Brian. "It doesn't seem fair. We never speak of her. Maybe they know it when they're gone. Maybe it makes them lonely not to be spoken of."

He laughed a little self-consciously, to take off the edge of the mawkishness of what he was saying and feeling.

"I sort of feel that I'd like her to share all my happiness, and—I suppose you think I'm talking like a girl?"

"No! No! It is an added grace to a strong man when he has sentiment."

Miss Van Studdiford never failed the opportunity of pointing out little niceties of conduct and thought.

" Where was my mother? Where did they put her when she died? Why do we never go to the place where she is buried?" Brian persisted.

" I don't know. I mean, it is very far away. I never thought it was good for children to nurse sad memories."

" But it isn't a sad memory to me. She seems a sort of nice dream, my mother. Besides, I'm not a child now, and I'd like to know. I'd like to go with Edith some day to that—that place. I think it's right I should."

Miss Van Studdiford's face became very strained and white. She hated to lie, for she thought it a deadly sin, but she saw no way out of it.

" It's not in this country at all—in Ireland," she murmured, scarce above a breath.

Brian looked puzzled.

" But she was here, Aunt Van! I remember she used to come to the garden. I remember it distinctly. It's odd, but I remember a brooch with red stones in it. She used to let me play with it. It's strange remembering a thing like that, and forgetting so much else! All the way home to-day I was thinking of her. I can almost remember how she looked. Her eyes were big! What relation was she to you, Aunt Van?"

" Very distant," said Miss Van Studdiford in a smothered tone. " A distant cousin."

How deep she was getting into the morass of untruth! How uncomfortable, how distressing it was! Weak tears came to her eyes.

" I want to know more about her, Aunt Van. You never told me anything. Why should you make a mystery of it?"

" I'm not. It is you who are making it a mystery. I can't talk about it. It is all too painful. I won't talk about it, Brian—I will not!"

She fell to sobbing. It was very painful to see an old woman cry.

" Then don't," said Brian, rising and patting her shoulder. " I didn't mean to distress you. We won't say any more about it, now."

Miss Van Studdiford took his hand and clung to it.

" You've never distressed me," she said. " You've always been good, Brian. I'm nervous and upset. It's this dreadful war! I keep fearing that you may be ordered away. I'm an old woman, and you are all I have!"

" Ordered away! Small chance of that, worse luck! Why, Aunt Van, the war 'll be over in a few months. I shall never see active service. I'm just a parlor soldier. If you had only let me enlist when I wanted to!"

Miss Van Studdiford shook her head. This was the one sore subject between them.

In a few moments he left her and went upstairs to his room, feeling very much dissatisfied and puzzled. Was there some stain upon his birth, he wondered, which made Aunt Van reluctant to discuss his mother with him? No! No! He wouldn't think that—not for a moment! Not of his sweet, beautiful mother, whose image began to grow stronger and more distinct to him.

Early the next afternoon, as soon as Brian was relieved from duty at the armory, he went down town to see Mr. Cutting at the banker's office. He felt very nervous about the coming interview. Mr. Cutting was a rich and influential man, and had a stern manner that made him difficult of approach.

Brian was asked to wait in the outer office, as the banker was engaged. He sat there for ten minutes or so. Then the door of the private office opened, and a woman came out. It was Edith's old nurse.

Again Brian experienced the odd emotion that her appearance the day before had brought to him — a sort of puzzled groping for an elusive memory.

Ellen looked very much disturbed. Her face was flushed.

Brian welcomed the opportunity to make up for his boorishness of the day before.

" How do you do?" he said, standing before her with his cap in his left hand and a very pleasant smile upon his face.

He extended his other hand to her. Ellen forced herself to take it with seeming indifference.

" I'm very well, sir, I thank you," she said, trying to put calmness and respect into her tone.

Her voice sent a thrill through Brian—her touch, too. He couldn't understand it.

" Where have I met you before?" he asked, clinging to her hand, which she was trying to withdraw from his clasp. " Surely I've met you before?"

She shook her head dumbly, not looking at him.

Just then a secretary came to say that Mr. Cutting would see Lieutenant Van Studdiford, so he was obliged to leave Ellen there, with all sorts of unanswered questions between them.

When he went into the office, he found the banker looking very glum.

" Well, Van Studdiford," he said, " I'm in a devil of a stew! See that woman who just went out?"

" Yes, sir."

" Well, she's been with us for twenty years—more than twenty years—and now she comes and gives me a month's notice. She hadn't the courage to tell my wife. I don't wonder! Of all ingratitude! Why, we've treated her like one of ourselves. I won't have it!" He thumped his fist upon the desk. " I told her so. She raised every one of my children. Gad, who's going to put the studs in my shirt and tie my tie?"

He looked indignantly at Brian, as if expecting him to answer the question.

" Why is she leaving?" asked Brian.

" Hasn't any reason at all—not a blamed reason. Oh, women are the devil!"

Brian felt apprehensive. It was unfortunate that Mr. Cutting had been put into a temper just when, perhaps, he had come to make him more angry still.

Suddenly Cutting's eyes twinkled.

" Well," he said, " I guess you didn't come to hear my domestic troubles. Edith paved the way for you this morning. What makes you think you can support my daughter in the style to which she is accustomed?"

" I can't; but I can take care of her, and I have a future. Judge Deems is going to take me into partnership."

" Yes, I know. I stopped in to see him this morning. I guess it's all right with me, young man, if her mother consents. She's mighty keen on family, you know."

" Well, my aunt, Miss Van Studdiford—" began Brian.

" Yes, yes—fine old stock, but not much in the public eye at present. Mrs. Cutting is a bit of a snob, you know, though she denies it. She likes to march with the big procession!" He rose and put his hand upon Brian's shoulder. " I guess it will be all right. She likes you, and so do I, and my little girl—well, I don't think there's ever been any one else for her, and I want her to be happy. But there must be no talk of marriage until the war is over. I don't share the popular optimism about it, either. I think it is going to be a long, hard struggle."

He grasped Brian's hand and shook it. The lieutenant grinned boyishly, and could find no words. It was wonderful to have the matter settled so quickly and easily! He went out of the office scarcely feeling the ground beneath his feet.

In the hallway the young man stopped to mop his brow. Beads of perspiration stood upon it, as if he had been running. He was breathless, too, but oh, so happy, so triumphant!

XII

A FEW blocks from Mr. Cutting's office, on the corner of Ann Street, was the building of the New York *Tribune*. Brian saw that there was an immense crowd gathered in the streets about it—a still, ominous-looking crowd, pushing sullenly forward to get a glimpse of the placards of news in the lower windows.

There was a certain element in the city which had worked itself up, or had been worked up by agitators, over the rumor that the negroes were to be emancipated. A fear had been engendered that, in this event, neither person nor property nor the honor of their womanhood would be safe. Horrible pictures had been implanted in the minds of the ignorant of a world overrun and devastated by hordes of black freedmen, who would reduce the social system to chaos and rule by right of numbers and brute strength.

Brian supposed that the news which was holding the crowd in such sullen, repressed stillness was a confirmation of the rumor of emancipation; but as he shouldered his way along he began to hear on all sides the word " draft " in muttered and rebellious tones.

So there was to be a draft! Soldiers were needed at the front, while his regiment was attending upon the mayor and policing mass meetings! Parlor soldiers! He began to share the indignation of the crowd. With the sublime egotism of youth he felt that if the gallant Tenth were ordered to the front, things would be settled in short order.

Suddenly the hot, fierce note of a fire bell was on the air. At once, as if it had been a signal, the sullen crowd through which Brian was pushing became a seething, yelling mob of rioters. With the suddenness of a feat of legerdemain, a frightened negro was lifted for a moment above the heads and shoulders of the crowd, his face ashen, his mouth stretched in an agonized yell. In another moment, it seemed, a rope had been produced, and the negro was hanging by the neck to a lamp-post, while the crowd swirled by and bumped against his dangling legs as he writhed in his death agony.

Brian was carried along with the mob. So tightly was he hemmed in that he could not reach the pistol at his belt. He thrust with his elbows and knees, shouting for order—futile shouts and ludicrous, in the face of the mad excitement which had seized the mob.

When at length he had fought his way free, he stood for a moment on the steps of the Chemical Bank, trying to regain his breath and to collect his thoughts. He was bruised and bleeding, and there was a wild ringing in his ears. About him were dinning bells and the summoning sound of trumpets, and here and there a glow of fire and columns of smoke. Not one fire, but a dozen, had been simultaneously kindled by incendiaries, who had been waiting for the signal of the announcement of the draft.

Running and stumbling, and being caught constantly in pools and eddies of excited rioters, somehow Brian reached the armory. He was immediately ordered, with a squad, to the street-car barns. They were to board a car, ride down into the midst of the turmoil, and attempt to quiet it by a show of authority. He had strict orders not to fire upon the crowd except in case of extremity.

Within half an hour his men were stationed, kneeling upon the seats of a little car, with a rifle protruding from each window. Upon the top there were more men, seated back to back, their firearms ready, with nervous fingers upon the triggers.

Brian stood upon the front platform, beside the terrified driver, his pistol in his hand. He felt strangely calm, and a little inclined to laugh at the humor of his strange entrance into the war — upon a street-car.

The car rattled rapidly down town. Soon they were in the thick of it, progressing slowly through a dense crowd, which fell back a bit and was quiet for the moment, daunted by the appearance of armed authority. Brian ordered the driver to stop. Leaning forward, he shouted, haranguing the crowd, bidding them remember that they were Americans—that the President expected every man to do his duty.

He got no further in his speech than that. A disgusted "Yah!" sounded from a hundred throats, and a big fellow in a leather apron sprang forward and struck one of the horses a stunning blow over the head with his cudgel. The poor beast staggered and fell, bringing his fellow down with him.

Brian gave the order to fire over the heads of the rioters, who backed away at the sound of the volley. Then, seeing its harmless intent, they surged back with a yell of derision, and enveloped the little car like a swarm of ants overrunning the dead body of a beetle.

The soldiers fought valiantly, but they were only twenty men to hundreds, and in less time than it takes to tell they were overpowered. Their rifles were wrested from them. Some of them were murdered in cold blood and hanged upon lamp-posts or street signs, beside the bodies of negroes.

A few of the soldiers escaped, Brian among them, fighting their way through the crowd with their fists, and helped by the gathering darkness.

All night the riot raged, and far into the following day. It was about noon when Brian, who had not slept or eaten, was ordered off duty for rest. He could find no rest, however, before assuring himself of the safety of Miss Van Studdiford, who was alone in a part of the town where there had been many fires.

When he reached their house, he found it deserted; but upon the hall table there was a note telling him that Mr. Cutting had sent his landau for Miss Van Studdiford, and that she was staying at the house on Washington Square until the riot should be quelled.

Walking as if in a hypnotic trance, Brian made his way toward the Cutting residence. His uniform was soiled and torn, his face blackened by smoke and smeared with blood. He noted subconsciously the devastation through which he went — smoking and blackened ruins, where yesterday there had been tall and stately buildings; benches upset in the parks, and trampled grass; ghastly black bodies hanging from posts and street signs—bodies which no one had dared to cut down; scattered groups of yelling, wild-eyed rioters, not yet satiated with their triumph.

It was all like a mad, impossible dream to Brian as he stumbled along, his only thought to be assured of the safety of those he loved before seeking rest or food.

Washington Square was practically deserted, and the barracks were empty, except for a few men left on guard. It seemed peaceful and quiet there, and Brian felt an almost irresistible impulse to sink upon the trampled turf and surrender himself to sleep.

Then, suddenly, he heard the sinister howl of an unbridled mob, the hateful sound which had been in his ears all night. Around the corner from Fifth Avenue he saw a group of men running in pursuit of a negro, who carried a basket from which articles were falling as he ran. It was old Joe, the Cuttings' butler, who had ventured out for provisions!

With a start Brian awoke from his walking trance. Yelling, he sprang across the street and stood between the fleeing negro and his pursuers.

The mob held back a bit, daunted for a moment by the pistol which Brian flourished. Old Joe gained the stoop, stumbled up the steps, and fumbled at the front door.

The happenings of the next few moments were so rapid that Brian was scarcely conscious of them. In swift succession came the sudden rush of the thwarted mob, his threat to shoot, the stinging impact of a stone upon his cheek, the click of a trigger, and the sickening realization that his weapon was empty. He backed up the steps. He could hear Joe's hoarse, strangled breathing behind him. The negro could not get the key into the lock, being too much overcome by fright to control his trembling hands.

Some soldiers were running across the street, but already a cudgel was poised above Brian's head. He heard a woman's scream, and two slender arms were extended over him, as if in benediction — two arms which received the impact of the descending cudgel with a sickening sound of breaking bones. Then Brian lapsed into unconsciousness.

When he came to his senses, he found himself lying upon a sofa in the Cuttings' drawing-room. He looked up into Edith's eyes, which were brimming with tears. Aunt Van stood beside him with something in a glass, her hand trembling so that the liquid was spilling upon the floor.

Edith put her arm about his shoulders and raised him a little, laying her soft cheek against his bruised face.

He saw a group over by the front window—Dr. Elbridge, and Mr. and Mrs. Cutting, and a little woman who sat there, very still and white, while her arm was being bandaged.

Brian tried to struggle to his feet, but found himself too weak to rise. He saw that the little woman upon whom the doctor was working had her eyes upon him, with a glad light in them. She seemed totally oblivious to what they were doing to her arm.

"Ellen saved your life, Brian," said Edith. "She took the blow upon her poor arm. Oh, dear Ellen!"

She ran across the room and sank upon her knees before her old nurse.

With an effort Brian rose and followed her, his knees trembling like those of a child learning to walk. Miss Van Studdiford clung to his arm. She seemed to want to hold him back.

"There, there, Edith!" said Mr. Cutting, a trifle testily. "How is the doctor to finish if you crowd about like this?"

"I'm all through," said the doctor, stepping back to yield his place to Brian. "I'll say for Ellen that she's the gamest wounded soldier I've ever handled."

"'Tis nothing," said Ellen. "I scarce feel the pain now."

"You shouldn't have—why did you?" stammered Brian. "You might have been killed!"

Ellen looked down upon her arm. She couldn't meet the grateful, concerned look in the boy's eyes.

"What's a broken arm?" she said. "My Miss Edith's heart would have been broken, otherwise."

"And that's true," said the doctor. "Even that glancing blow, which she deflected, left a pretty bad gash on your forehead, young man."

Brian put his hand up to the bandage upon his head. He had not been conscious of it before, but there was a dull, aching pain there.

"The full force of that cudgel would have cracked your skull," said the doctor emphatically. "You certainly owe your life to this little woman!"

At this Miss Van Studdiford began to

cry. In fact, she became hysterical, and it required the attention of the doctor and of every one else in the room to quiet and soothe her.

XIII

By noon of the following day the city had been brought to its normal state by the help of emergency troops which had been hastened there from a camp in New Jersey.

Permission had been gained for Brian to stay at the Cuttings' house for rest and recuperation, and Mrs. Cutting had invited a few friends to an informal luncheon, at which the engagement between Brian and her daughter was to be announced. Social activities were not entirely suspended at that time in New York, the war not having touched many families closely as yet.

The luncheon was to be a small affair, Judge Deems, Dr. Elbridge, and a few young friends of Edith's being the only guests outside of the family connections.

The table in the big dining room was gayly and patriotically decorated with flags, and there were many flowers from the small conservatory that jutted out in a bow from the back of the room.

Brian, feeling very little the worse for his experiences during the riot, was seated at Mrs. Cutting's right. He still wore a bandage about his head, and rather ruefully received the congratulations of his friends at having come through his first battle with so little hurt. He felt a little ashamed that it had been a cudgel in the hands of a rabble, rather than a rifle or sword in the hands of the enemy, which had left its mark upon him.

He wished that Aunt Van, who was seated upon his right, would not so often call attention to him by solicitous inquiries as to how he felt, and whether he was sure he was strong enough to sit up.

He thought about Ellen, whom he had not seen since the day before. He felt that she should be brought in and hailed as the real hero of the occasion.

The luncheon party began to be rather gay. There was wine, most of the guests were young, and the war seemed very far away.

On the appearance of the dessert, Mr. Cutting rose with a wineglass in his hand, and paused, smiling, as old Joe approached the group of servants assembled in the doorway. They had been sent for to drink a toast, with the guests, to the health and happiness of the young couple, as was the custom in that family. They stood in a giggling, embarrassed little group as Joe passed the tray with glasses among them.

"Friends," said Mr. Cutting, when the glasses were all filled, "it gives me great pleasure to announce the engagement of my daughter, Edith, to our gallant young friend, Lieutenant Van Studdiford. I think I may say without undue complacency that the contemplated union of members of two old and honorable families"—he waved his glass in the direction of Miss Van Studdiford, who looked very uncomfortable—"is most gratifying to Mrs. Cutting and myself."

The thoughts of every one at the table went to young Richard Cutting, the son, who was not present at the luncheon. He had married beneath him. His wife, the daughter of a small tradesman, had never been recognized by the family, which had an inordinate pride of caste.

"I ask you all to join me," Mr. Cutting went on, "in a toast to the health, long life, and happiness of my daughter and my future son-in-law!"

As the glasses were raised and drained, there came a long and imperative ringing of the front doorbell. It sounded ominous, somehow, coming at that moment.

It *was* ominous! An orderly had come with the news that Lee had invaded Pennsylvania, that the Tenth Regiment had been ordered to the front, and that Lieutenant Van Studdiford was to report at the armory at once.

It was as if a bomb had exploded in that safe, luxurious room. Consternation struck them all into a shocked silence. The enemy in Pennsylvania! The war so near at last! There was no sound, for a moment, as faces grew white and frightened eyes stared at the bringer of such evil news.

Suddenly Miss Van Studdiford shrieked and threw her arms about Brian, crying that she would not let him go. He tried to comfort her. Then, putting her aside into sympathetic arms, he faced Edith, who stood looking at him dumbly, stricken, trying to call a brave smile to her stiffened lips.

As Brian took her in his arms, over her head he saw a white face, which seemed to stand out in unnatural distinctness from the blur of other white faces. It was Ellen's face, old, lined, wistful, with a look in her eyes which he could scarcely meet for the pain and suffering that it expressed.

Scarcely realizing what he was doing, he kissed Edith, surrendered her to her father's arms, and went toward the old woman by the door. He was drawn by an irresistible impulse, not knowing what he meant to do or say.

"You—you—" he stammered. "You mustn't leave her. She loves you. They said you were going to leave. She cried about it. She doesn't want you to go. You won't, will you?"

Ellen shook her head dumbly.

"I'd like to think she had you if—if anything happened," he went on. "She—"

He could find no further words. Ellen's eyes were upon him with a hungry, possessive, yet renouncing gaze, which choked the words in his throat. They stood there gazing at each other.

Miss Van Studdiford tugged at Brian's arm. He looked down upon the anxious old face without clearly recognizing, at first, who it was that claimed his attention. There was a look in her eyes which he had never seen before—a new light of unselfish impulse.

"I can't stand it!" she said, not looking at him, but at Ellen. "You—you—it isn't fair! The whole burden! Tell him! Tell him!"

With a tremendous effort Ellen gathered her scattered wits together. She saw that Miss Van Studdiford was upon the point of ruining the whole work of her long years of self-denial, and of shaming Brian by betraying his humble parentage before that proud company.

"You must stand it, madam," she said, purposely misinterpreting the import of Miss Van Studdiford's words. "Your son must do his duty. Go, go quickly," she said to Brian. "Do not prolong your mother's suffering!"

"Yes! Yes! I must go at once," answered Brian, wondering at the commanding look this humble woman had given the other. "Don't fret," he said to Miss Van Studdiford. "I'll be back before you know it—mother!"

He turned and hastily shook the hands of the guests, and then, with another kiss and embrace for Edith and his adopted mother, he went hastily from the room. In a moment the front door banged, and he was gone.

Every one gathered about Edith and Miss Van Studdiford, trying to comfort and reassure them.

Ellen crept to the front window. Was that Brian striding across the park? She wasn't sure—there were so many blue uniforms and sturdy figures there.

"Ellen! Ellen!" Edith was beside her. Ellen put her good arm about the girl, who nestled to her side. "Say you'll stay, Ellen! Say you won't leave me now!"

"I'll stay, deary. Yes, I'll stay!"

They stood there for a long time, and then Mr. Cutting came and took Edith away. He said the carriage was ready. They were going to drive down to the ferry to see the regiment depart.

Presently Ellen stood again at the window, alone. She saw them driving away—Mr. and Mrs. Cutting, Miss Van Studdiford, and Edith. Then she went painfully upstairs, where she put on her shabby old bonnet and shawl. She, too, meant to see the regiment go away.

She felt strangely calm as she gave orders in the kitchen for dinner that night, and then went quietly out by the garden gate.

No one noticed the shabby figure hastening down Broadway, jostled and shoved this way and that by the crowd, which grew more and more dense as she made her way down town. On Cortlandt Street, which led to the ferry, the sidewalks were packed with excited people, waiting to see the Tenth march by.

Ellen wormed her way through the press, guarding her bandaged arm as well as she could, though several times it was severely pressed upon and hurt. Soon her shawl was pulled away from her shoulders. Mechanically she grasped the end of it in her free hand.

There was a keen wind blowing from the river, but she did not feel it. Her bonnet was knocked to the back of her head, and wisps of gray hair blew over her eyes. She was conscious of nothing but the determination to get to the end of the street, where she might gain a vantage point from which to look upon her boy's face once again.

She heard the shrill sound of fifes and the roll of drums, and felt the crowd pack more and more tightly about her. The regiment was coming!

She was being hurt, terribly hurt, by the pressure, but she was scarcely conscious of it. She could see nothing but heads and shoulders, being a little woman.

There was a sound of marching feet, and

a band broke into a gay tune. The crowd squeezed closer and more close. A woman screamed and fainted and went down, unheeded by the crowd. Ellen, half conscious, grasped at the arm of a big man in front of her to keep herself from falling, too.

A good-natured face looked down upon her.

"Hey, old lady, hey!" the man shouted. "This is no place for you!"

"My son!" she gasped. "My son! I must see him!"

The man thrust out with his big arms, elbowing right and left to make room for her, calling:

"Easy there! Let the old lady by! Somebody's mother wants to get a look! Easy there!"

Sheltering her with his great bulk, he pushed Ellen through the crowd to the edge of the curb.

Many soldiers were marching by. They looked dim and shadowy to her. She wondered confusedly why it had grown dark so suddenly.

People were cheering. Hats were flying in the air. Flowers were falling under the feet of the marching men. Dim soldiers were passing by, all looking alike to Ellen —pale and shadowy, as if in a dream.

Company after company passed. The little figure lurched against the big man, who put his arm about her, to keep her from being pushed from the curb.

As she rested there in the hollow of that strong arm, there came to her a burst of glorious music. A great chorus it seemed, shouting:

"Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

There was a bright light all about her, and the arm that held her so closely was her own boy's arm. How good it was to feel the embrace for which she had hungered for so many years!

It seemed to her that he lifted her face to his and gazed long into her eyes, and that the name "Mother Machree" formed upon his lips.

The moment was pure bliss!

"This is enough!" she said. "This pays for all!"

"Easy there! Easy there!" said the big man, as he felt the little figure crumple within his arm. "Easy there! The old lady has fainted!"

After the regiment had passed by, a doctor forced his way through the crowd to where the big man still held Ellen's slender form. He looked at the peaceful face with the joyous smile upon it, and took off his hat.

"It isn't a faint," he said. "She's gone."

"Gone!" said the man who held her. "I wonder what she saw! That look on her face! It can't be so bad, going like that."

THE END

RELEASE

For many a year did I with Sorrow bide—
Old haunting Sorrow, gray and hollow-eyed;
He dogged my steps where'er I turned to go,
If I trod swift or slow.

If in the night I dreamed that he were gone,
I felt his presence by me in the dawn;
The spell he cast upon me in close wise
I could not exorcise.

I thrust him from me, but without avail;
Like the grim seaman of the Persian tale
Did he bestride my neck and clutch and cleave,
And grant me no reprieve.

And then Love came upon a radiant day;
Sorrow with shriveled face slunk fast away;
Now I am safe from all his cruel harms
Within Love's shielding arms!

Clinton Scollard

The Twisted Foot

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT WEST

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Rider of Golden Bar," etc.

IN the bunk house of the Eighty-Eight Ranch, Bill Holliday, cowboy, raised his cheerful voice to greet the morn with song:

"I looked over Jordan, and what did I see
  Coming for to carry me home?
A band of angels coming for me—
  Coming for to carry me home!"

"You're mistaken, Bill," declared his cousin, Buff Warren, when the singer paused to take breath for the next verse. "That wasn't any band of angels you saw. That was a posse, and I wish to Gawd they'd caught you and hung you good! Can't you sing without making all that noise?"

"If he could, he'd be in grand opera," snorted freckled-faced Bat Allen, from the depths of the bunk house towel.

"What say we throw him out?" suggested Tile Stanton, who was sitting on the edge of his bunk, pulling on his trousers.

"I'd like to see you try throwing me out!" cried Bill Holliday, reaching purposefully for Tile, but colliding, instead, with Buff Warren.

The latter seized Bill whole-heartedly, and they wrestled each other across the room and fell headlong over the doorsill. The more agile Buff, having contrived to roll Holliday and put him face downward in the grass, turned to shout for Tile, but paused with his mouth open. Within twenty feet of him there was a girl—a girl on a horse, a pretty girl with honey-colored hair and amber eyes, a girl who made him think of home, and the blue Pennsylvania hills, and cowbells tinkling through the dusk, and mountain laurel, and the sweet scent of the "honeyshucks" along a dusty road.

It did not strike Buff, at the moment, that the horse she rode was thin, or that she was shabbily dressed in a man's shirt, an old skirt patched over one knee, and scuffed boots. No, the significance of these things did not sink in, because when he glimpsed her she pushed back on her hatless head the mop of honey-colored hair, and smiled upon him sweetly.

Buff immediately felt a warm, cheery sensation permeate his breakfastless being. As he smiled back, he absent-mindedly ground his cousin's nose a trifle deeper into the grass.

"Good morning," said the girl in a voice that was own fellow to the smile. "Have you seen anything of a gray mule around here?"

"Is this it?" he asked idiotically, jerking his chin at the man he was holding down, for the warm, cheery sensation was affecting his brain like raw whisky, only more pleasantly. "Is this it?" he repeated to her stare of surprise.

The smile had left the girl's face, but two dimples had come instead.

"No," she said, with a serious shake of her head.

"I expect your mule had four legs," said Buff, becoming totally unmindful of the fact that there was work to do that day. "I—I—if you'll wait a shake, I'll get my horse and help hunt that mule."

"I can't let you do that," she said with finality, and picked up her bridle. "I guess the mule didn't come this far, anyway. So long!"

She gave him a friendly nod, and kicked her thin mount into a trot. Buff remained where he was, staring after that honey-colored head.

"My gosh!" he said. "My gosh!"

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The voice of Bill Holliday filtered through the grass in a rabid snarl.

"It 'll be my Gawd and some more yet if you don't lemme up!"

Buff abstractedly released the arm that he held bent over the small of his cousin's back, and arose. His cousin arose, too, muttering curses and rubbing the aforementioned arm.

"What you trying to do — break my arm? If that girl hadn't been there, I'd have—"

He paused. Words failed him.

Buff seized him by the shoulder.

"Did you ever see anything like her?" he demanded eagerly.

His cousin twitched away with a cry.

"That's the shoulder you almost put out of joint!" he snapped. "A joke's a joke, damn it all, but you're too much of a humorist!"

Buff Warren cast a glance over his shoulder at the bunk house. From the open doorway came the brisk chatter of Bat Allen arguing anent the merits of his pet pony. Evidently none of the Eighty-Eight boys had witnessed either the arrival or the departure of the girl on the thin horse.

"Calling me a mule in front of her!" grumbled Holliday, boiling over with his grievance. "What you do it for? I've a good mind to bust you one for luck!"

Buff held up a restraining hand.

"Be calm—be very calm. I have some news for you." He came close, and, when the touchy William shied away, he plucked him by the sleeve. "You see that girl?" he continued. "You see that girl?" he repeated in a still more earnest tone, when his cousin blinked at him.

"Yeah," said Holliday crossly. "I see her."

"Take a good look at her. She's my girl, she is!"

"Your girl?" exclaimed Bill.

"Mine," Buff declared firmly.

"Who is she?" demanded Bill, much interested.

"I don't know."

"But you said—"

"And I meant every word I said," averred Buff, regarding his mystified relative with some truculence.

Holliday batted his eyes.

"If she's your girl, you'd ought to know who she is!"

"How could I know? I never saw her before."

"You never saw her before!" Holliday repeated, bewilderedly. He put up a stiffened forefinger and rotated it beside his left ear. "Wheels! Hear 'em buzz! Or else you're drunk. If so," he added hopefully, "where did you hide the bottle?"

Buff paid Holliday no further attention. Legs spread, hands on hips, he stood at gaze and beamed. Honey-colored hair and amber eyes—the Pennsylvania hills—the honeyshucks, the—

"I ain't deaf," he said coldly to his cousin.

"You sure act like it! I only repeated myself four times in your ear. I want to get this straight, Buff. You never saw this girl before, but she's your girl. How do you explain it, and does she know it?"

"I can't, and she don't, but she will."

With this apparently cryptic remark, Buff turned and entered the kitchen in obedience to the cook's bawl of—

"Come and get it!"

"Ub-glub-blub-blah," Alonzo Peters announced brightly, in the middle of his breakfast.

"I think so, too," assented Buff. "In fact, we're all with you, Lonzo."

"Lonzo's gone back to his happy childhood," said Tile Stanton.

"First I knew he ever left it," said Buff.

"Take another mouthful, Lonzo," suggested Dan Gildersleeve kindly. "Then maybe I can understand you."

"Talking and eating are two men's work," said Buff. "Lonzo ought to be twins."

"'Tain't necessary," snarled Jimmy, the cook. "He eats more than any six men right now."

Alonzo swallowed hard, constrictor-like, drank half a cup of coffee at a gulp, sighed deeply, and said:

"I hear the Twisted Foot got Cobway of Marysville and nine hundred dollars three days ago."

"The son of a gun!" exclaimed Buff. "Who told you?"

"Rum. I saw him just now when I went up to the office for tobacco."

"That makes nine he's beefed in four years," said the Kid's Twin.

"Ten," corrected Bill Holliday; "and Gawd only knows how many holdups when there wasn't a burial. He's sure a sidewinder, that fellah! Pass the salt, will you, Kid?"

The arrival of a fresh plate of steaks distracted their attention, and they forgot for the nonce the Twisted Foot, the most famous criminal of the Territory. The popular name of this mysterious malefactor was derived from the fact that while the track of the murderer's left boot was in every way normal, that of the right one, instead of curving properly to the left, bent to the right.

The Twisted Foot confined his criminal activities to holdups—stage and individual. He robbed women as well as men. As Bill Holliday said, at least ten leading citizens within the past four years had been found murdered and robbed by this unknown but formidable ruffian, who always left near the body of his victim a few of his peculiar boot marks and a cigarette butt or two of the peculiar " saddleblanket " papers of the Southwest.

Scarcely a month passed without its holdup by the Twisted Foot. There were other holdups by other talent, but these were spur-of-the-moment, negligible affairs, in which small sums had been taken. The robberies of the Twisted Foot were always for large amounts. He seemed to have an uncanny faculty of determining whose poke was full of gold eagles.

When the Twisted Foot did not kill, it was his harsh custom to wound. He invariably shot from behind. Despite this cowardly propensity, coupled with his habit of running away when the odds were against him, he could fight, and fight well, when the issue was forced upon him. Once, when cut off and surrounded by the Sunset County sheriff and three deputies, he had fought the four to a standstill, killing two deputies, badly wounding the third, and grazing the sheriff.

Following that set-to, he had escaped, as usual. He always escaped, and people had come to believe that he always would. So elusive were the movements of the Twisted Foot that a ghostly character would have been attributed to him, were it not for the dead bodies of his victims. A ghost does not use firearms.

II

Buff, saddling in the corral after breakfast, was not nearly as happy as the proverbial clam. In spite of the confident remarks he had made to his cousin, he could not quite fathom how he was going to ever see that girl again, much less make her his own.

" Idiot!" he told himself, his head under the left fender. " Idiot! I always did ford the creek before I reached it. Hold *still,* you four-legged accordion!"

But the four-legged accordion had a mind of his own. It was several minutes before Buff could pass the cinch strap in the last turn, make his loop, and pull it tight. The others had all left the corral when he led out and closed the gate.

" Hey, Buff!"

He looked up. Rum Gordon, the foreman, was walking toward him from the ranch house. Behind Rum came his brother-in-law, Sam Caltrop, manager and majority stockholder of the Eighty-Eight.

" What you doing to-day, Buff?" asked Rum.

" Farewell, you told me, for the mail."

" Sure enough—I forgot. Well, on your way back, I wish you'd stop at McFluke's old place and tell any nesters you find there to travel."

" First I heard there's any there."

" Tim Page, of the Bar S, told me yesterday. He saw 'em when he passed that way hunting stray horses. Anyway, they've got to drag it."

" And make it strong, Buff," chipped in Sam Caltrop. " I believe in the golden rule, and I'm the last man to be hard on anybody, but I can't have nesters on the range. Sooner have the itch!"

" All right," said Buff shortly, and topped his mount.

The horse, a red-tempered blue, went up like a shot. Buff socked home the spurs and laced him across the nose with his quirt. The brute sneezed, and began to sidewheel it.

" Quit it!" Buff grated between set teeth. " Quit it! I don't feel like fooling any. You will, huh? All right—let her slipper!"

He raked the horse's flanks with the spurs till they looked like a plowed field. The blue rocketed over the landscape with all the verve and abandon of a distracted jack rabbit. Then, the prodding spurs weakening the jest of the performance, the horse's frantic fury died; but Buff would not have it so.

" No, no, Blue Grass — no easy little road gait for you!" he cried, and thoroughly whanged the blue behind the saddle. " You wanted to hop, so hop!"

But hopping was now the last thing desired by the tormented blue. He ran as only a cow horse can. When Buff slowed him down under a cut bank, three miles from the ranch house, he was a very good horse.

Buff rolled a cigarette one-handed, snapped a match into flame with his thumb nail, and lit the brown roll. He inhaled deeply, coughed, choked on an expletive, and snatched at his hat, which was on the point of parting company with his black hair.

The cough, the choke, and the snatch had been called forth by a frenzied side leap of Blue Grass. Buff stayed with his horse, but his head snapped on his neck with a force that made it ache.

The cause of the shy was the rattling descent of the cut bank by another horse and rider. Buff dragged his mount to a standstill. A gleam of pleasure lit his eye when he recognized the rider.

"Howdy, Rainbow?" said he, and dragged off his hat. "Might as well kill a man as scare him to death."

"I wanted to see how well you rode," replied Rainbow, smiling mischievously. "You'll make a rider yet. What did you try to choke the horn for?"

"You never saw me pulling leather," said he, with a grin. "Where you going?"

"Over to see Mame. She home?"

Mame was Sam Caltrop's wife. She and Rainbow, the half-breed niece of those highly respectable redskins, Willie's Old Brother-in-Law and his two sisters, Two Cloud and Little Deer, were as friendly as the proverbial kittens in a basket.

It may be said, in passing, that Rainbow was a handsome girl with an excellent figure and a complexion no darker than that of the average brunette. She never acted like a true Indian. Her stoicism, among other aboriginal attributes, had completely vanished. She had gone to school in a convent for six years, and could keep house as well or better than Mame Caltrop herself. She spent her summers with her uncle and aunts in their tepees on the range or the reservation, her winters with her father, Peter Fernald, a storekeeper in Marysville. Her mother was dead.

So much for Rainbow.

"Yep," said Buff, "Mame's home. You go see her. Go right in the kitchen and make a batch of raisin pies, and when I get home you give 'em to me, and I'll give you a bright, new, shiny dime. How's that for high?"

"Too high for me to see, Buffy. You and your raisin pies! When it comes to eating, you remind me of the bottomless pit. Heard the news? No, real news. No catch about it."

"I'll bite," hesitated the suspicious puncher.

"Rafferty's dead."

"No! Is he?" exclaimed Buff, for Rafferty was the sheriff's chief deputy, and a personage in the county. "Who killed him?"

"Acute toxic coma, complicated by a fracture of the cervical vertebræ, so Doc Homer said; but it looked to me like plain, old-fashioned D.T.'s and the broken neck he got when he fell out the window of Lainey's Hotel. Doc ought to have known better than to leave Rafferty alone when he gets that way. He'll know better next time—the nitwit!" she added vindictively, not so much because she deplored the removal of Rafferty as because she detested inefficiency.

"I suppose the sheriff has shoved up that featherbed, Nap Tobias, to chief deputy, and appointed Rupe Wilton to the vacancy. He always did want the job."

"Yes to the first, no to the second," said Rainbow. "Rupe got a job on the railroad last week — Piegan City. I wish I was a man!"

"I don't. You make too good-looking a girl."

"Don't you try to feed me sugar! I know you, you flirt! Anyway, I wish I was a man. Why do I wish I was a man? I wish I was a man so I could go to Mr. Sheriff Joe Mack and strike him for that deputy's job."

Buff Warren was moved to laugh.

"I don't think much of your ambition," he told her bluntly. "What's a second deputy? A little less than half o' nothing."

Her black eyes sparkled with irritation.

"A job is what you make of it. Just because Nap Tobias always was a figurehead, like Rafferty, it don't signify that he has to be one. No, if he had any gump—but he hasn't, not a bit; and the sheriff runs his office to suit himself."

"And his friends."

Her scorn was superb.

"And his friends—his highly honorable friends! Oh, you men! You're a putrid lot!"

"Here, what's biting you?" demanded Buff. "What did I ever do?"

"Nothing—that's just it. You're like all the rest of the bunch. You don't amount to anything, you never will amount to anything, and, what's more, you don't want to amount to anything. Would you turn your hand to right a wrong? Not you! So long as you get three meals a day and don't freeze to death, you've got the comfortable idea that all the rest of the world is well fed and warm as toast. Oh, you men! You make me sick!"

"You've been reading those dime novels again," Buff remarked placidly, "and somebody has been feeding you raw meat."

"I'd enjoy boxing your silly ears!" snarled Rainbow. "I'll bet I know where you're going this minute. You're going to McFluke's old place, to tell the Fairs to get out."

"You'd lose. I ain't going there till to-morrow morning. Is Fair the name of those nesters?"

"Yes, Fair's the name of those nesters. It's a shame Caltrop doesn't run a fence around the whole Territory, and be done with it. You'd think he owned the earth, the way he acts—the skinflint! Mame's all right, and I like her, but her husband will pinch a dollar till Liberty goes black in the face!"

"Outside of that, he's all right, huh?"

"And I suppose you'll enjoy the job of telling 'em to drift."

"We-ell, I don't know that I'll enjoy it, exactly," Buff defended himself weakly; "but you know how it is yourself, Rainbow—we can't have nesters balling up the range till you can't turn around, and rustling our cattle. What with wolves, and coyotes, and lions, it's bad enough now. A fellah has to make a profit."

Rainbow set her stubborn chin.

"It's free range."

"Sure it is—for the cattlemen."

"For everybody."

He shook his head.

"You're wrong there. We were here first."

"And of course that — oh, what's the use of arguing with a mule? All I have to say is that it's a crying shame, and I wish I was a man for about six months! I'd show 'em!"

"And in the meantime, Rainbow, while you're busy wishing for the moon thisaway, you might tell me something. You know everybody and everything in the county, just about. Do you know a girl with browny-goldy-yellowy hair, amber-colored eyes, and a bay horse, kind of thin, with two white feet and a wall eye? And she wears a white handkerchief with three blue stripes on the border round her neck."

Rainbow dropped her eyelids. When she raised them again, there was an odd glint in the depths of her black eyes. When she spoke to Buff Warren, the harsh note had completely vanished from her voice. She almost cooed like a dove.

"Browny-goldy-yellowy hair with three blue stripes, you say? About thirty or forty years old, isn't she?"

"No, she isn't she, smarty! Girl about twenty, I guess."

"About twenty!" mused Rainbow, finger on lip. "And she's kind of thin, with a wall eye and two white feet!"

"That was the horse, I told you!"

"Please excuse me. Don't mumble your words next time. Yes, I think I know the blue-striped girl you mean—the wall-eyed horse, too, for that matter. I suppose you want to find the girl so you can buy the horse. Is that the idea?"

"Something like that. Where she live?"

"I wonder do you really want to know!"

"What do you suppose I keep asking you for?"

"I hoped you were doing it as an excuse to talk to me. I see I was mistaken. My heart is broken. I'll never believe another man again—never!"

"Listen here, Rainbow," said Buff in his most wheedling tone. "Quit your deviling, there's a good girl, and tell Buffy what he wants to know."

"Wouldn't you like me to?"

"And they say women were put into the world to be a help! Rainbow, I wish I was your pa for ten minutes. I do so!"

"All right," said Rainbow. "I'll tell you"—Buff's face lightened like a sunrise—"but not to-day"—sunset and evening star. "Come around to-morrow, Buff, and, if you still want to know, I'll tell you then. Tell you what I will do," she added, ignoring his protests. "I'll make a bet with you. Oh, shut up! Don't be such an infernal baby! Anybody would think you were three years old, the way you act. If you can't have what you want when you want it, you sulk and kick the furniture. This bet, now—I'll bet you the best split-ear bridle in the Blue Pigeon store that you don't run off the Fairs."

"Won't I? You'll see!"

"Caltrop may, but you won't have a hand in it."

"You mean they'll try to rub me out?"

"No, I don't. They're not that kind. They're good people. I mean what I say—you won't be a party to running them off."

"The best split-ear in the Blue Pigeon! Can I pick it out myself?"

"If you win."

"The little hoss is wearing it already. Your camp still in Rattlesnake Draw? Good enough! I'll be around to-morrow to find out where that girl is at, and to tell you I won the bet. So long!"

Rainbow tickled her horse into a trot.

"What cocksure fools men are!" she said aloud. "I know the very bridle I'm going to have!"

Buff, with the ranch mail in a gunny sack on his saddle and one of the Canton's best meals under his belt, went into the Starlight Saloon for something to top off with. He found the place empty of customers, and Hilario Chavez, the Mexican bartender, in process of being fired by Mrs. Fernie, the proprietor.

"It isn't that you don't take in enough cash," complained the owner, who was behind the bar, while the bartender was in front of it; "but you don't put enough into the till. You can drag it—now!"

"Is that so?" said the bartender, who, like his erstwhile employer, was unconscious that a guest had entered. "Is that so? Where's my money?"

"There."

A little heap of gold and silver lay on the top of the bar. As she spoke, the lady pushed the pile toward the man—which action was evidently what he had been waiting for. He seized her wrist and pulled her forward and partly across the bar. A knife appeared in his right hand.

"I go," he chuckled, "but I'll take something with me besides my wages — your beauty! Scream, I slit your throat. Ah-h-h!"

The tailpiece of his remarks was caused by Buff jamming the muzzle of his six-shooter into the small of the Mexican's back.

"The knife, Hilario!" murmured Buff, his hand on the other's collar. "Lay it down, and let the lady go. That's right! You're a sensible man, I see, and would like to depart in peace, not in pieces. I don't hear you laugh. You should cultivate a sense of humor, Hilario. It will help you over many a rough place, just as I'm going to help you over this doorsill!"

While he kept up his steady flow of conversation, Buff had been propelling Chavez toward the door, which was open. With an accurately placed toe, he kicked Chavez through the doorway. The man, his body bowed outward, skittered across the sidewalk and fell on his face in the roadway. Buff stood in the doorway, watching him, as he scrambled to his feet and dusted himself with angry spats of the hand.

"Here's your knife, Hilario," said Buff, and tossed him the blade—in two pieces.

Chavez looked at the broken blade. He looked at Buff and Buff's gun. Then he went elsewhere. The cowboy did not go back into the saloon until he was out of sight.

There was more than admiration in Mrs. Fernie's handsome eyes when he again faced the bar and herself. She stretched a cool hand out to him.

"You certainly have the knack of coming at the right time!" said she. "That Chavez animal is a dirty little rat. He had me so I couldn't reach the gun in the drawer. Shake!"

He shook, and smiled upon her; but he withdrew his fingers from her clasp sooner than she would have wished. Almost any other man of the neighborhood would have proved more complaisant; for Lil Fernie was a widow with all a widow's ways, a figure, a gorgeous mop of red hair, her own complexion, and a temper which she was clever enough, as a rule, to ride on the curb. Besides being a fairly good business woman, except upon those rare occasions when her rather ardent heart dictated to her otherwise cool head, she knew what was what and on which side her bread was buttered. It may be said that since her husband's demise she had prospered amazingly.

It was this attractive person, then, who had just given thanks to Buff, and who now pushed the customary bottle and glass across the bar.

"Have one with me," Buff invited her politely.

"A short beer, if you don't mind," replied the lady, and drew one that was mainly collar.

"How!" intoned Buff, completing the ritual by looking at Lil over the rim of his glass.

"How!" cooed she, and tossed off her drink at one swallow.

"Have another?" asked Buff.

"One is my limit. Take your hand out of your pocket. It's all on the house. You can't spend a dime in here to-day. *You* have another?"

So Buff had another, but refused a third.

"Two's my limit," said he, with a grin. "I know when to stop."

The lady smiled, and reached for the bottle in such a roundabout way that her wrist touched the back of Buff's hand where it rested on the bar—touched and rested a not too fleeting instant. Although Lil had never before accorded him such an attention, Buff ordinarily would have been gallant enough to have played up properly by turning over his hand and grasping the lady's fingers; but now he hardly noticed the incident. He was too busy thinking of another girl—a girl with amber eyes and honey-colored hair.

Lil was piqued. This did not fit in with a plan of hers—a plan with which she had been flirting for some time, but about which she had not been quite able to make up her mind, until Buff's excellent handling of the Chavez incident had crystallized flirtation into decision. A line appeared between her level brows. The unconscious Buff turned to go. The line was ironed out as if by magic.

"Wait a minute, Buff," said she. "You're not in a hurry, are you?"

"Not especially," replied Buff, turning back. "Why?"

"I want to talk to you," she told him, her lips curving in an appealing smile. "I'm lonely."

"Are you?"

"I am. You can't imagine how lonely it is for a widow."

"That's sure tough," said Buff, experiencing a vague unease.

"I like to have a man around the place," pursued the lady, her handsome eyes languishing at him.

"You can easy get another bartender."

"I don't mean a bartender. I mean a man—like—like my husband."

"You'll travel a long way before you find somebody like him. He was a fine fellah!"

"He was," sighed the widow, her eyes demurely downcast. Slowly she raised them and transfixed Buff with a warm stare. "But there are others."

"I guess there are," admitted Buff. "Well, I must be going."

"Oh, Buff, wait a minute! There's something I want you to do for me out back."

"Well—"

"Don't you want to help me?" she asked plaintively.

"Why, sure," assented Buff. "Lead me to it."

Lil literally did this when she had closed and locked the street door. She took Buff's hand in her own warm clasp and led him into her private apartment at the south end of the saloon. The manual contact did not thrill Buff, but he felt that it would have been rude to withdraw his fingers. He never was one to tease or annoy a woman. After all, it was only Lil, a good friend of his. He had known her ever since he first came to the Southwest.

Buff looked about him in amazement when he entered Lil's sitting room. To his eyes it was a luxurious apartment; and so it actually was, considering the time and place. On the floor were Jicarilla blankets, fantastic and beautiful. Running across the table in the center of the room were Sioux saddle pockets of buckskin, with fringe ten inches long. On the saddle pockets stood a large nickel-plated lamp with a green, ribbed shade. Ornamenting one end of the table was a buffalo hunter's knife in a beaded, embroidered, and fringed scabbard — the kind of scabbard that is worn inside the belt. On the other end of the table were an ash receiver and the *Rocky Mountain News*.

Beside the table was an army chair of the heavy Southwestern model, its stretch leathers made of bridle reins an inch wide. Across the room at one of the windows was another similar army chair. In front of the other window was a couch covered with a Hopi blanket. Heavy white curtains draped the windows.

On three walls were hung exquisite specimens of Jicarilla saddle blankets. Three large Navaho blankets covered the fourth wall from floor to ceiling. There were no pictures. There was not even a mirror. It was essentially a man's room.

"Sit down over there," said Lil, releasing Buff's hand and indicating the couch. "I'll be back in a minute."

She pulled aside the central blanket of the three covering the end wall, and Buff saw a narrow, doorless doorway giving into another room. When she let the blanket fall behind her, no one would have imagined that the wall was not solid. Lil reappeared within the minute, bearing an Indian bowl containing a bag of tobacco, matches, and cigarette papers.

"I didn't know there was a room like this in the whole Territory," he said, as he seated himself on one end of the couch.

"You like it?" she asked, offering the bowl containing the smoker's materials.

He helped himself, and she sat down beside him—with the bowl between them, however.

"Make me one," she commanded, leaning back and crossing her legs.

When he held out the open roll for her to lick, she leaned forward, put out her pink tongue, and ran it along the edge. She sank slowly back, and on her face was the indescribably baffling expression that Leonardo da Vinci painted into the face of Mona Lisa. Buff construed it as a smile. He smiled back, folded down the paper, and handed her the finished cigarette.

"Thanks!" said she. "Now roll yours."

He obeyed, and she showed him how two cigarettes may be lit with one match. When the girl attracts you, this bit of business is not without interest. When the girl does not, it is silly. Buff thought it silly. He began to be a little bored.

"What did you want me to do for you?" he asked, inspecting the glowing end of his cigarette.

"I'll tell you in a moment," said she. "Why, aren't you comfortable?"

"Oh, I'm that all right, but—"

"Do you think it's kind to run away the moment you come in?" pouted the spider to the fly.

"I ain't running away," denied the fly. "I'm staying right here; only, if you've got anything you want me to do, the sooner I do it, the sooner it will be done."

"That's so," murmured the lady. "That rule applies to almost anything, doesn't it?"

So saying, she removed the bowl that lay between them, and edged closer to her prey.

"Buff," she went on, bending forward so that she could look into his face, "I wonder just how much you'd do for—for the person you loved?"

Buff nervously shuffled his feet. He cleared his throat. He grew red.

"I—uh—I dunno. I never thought about it."

She regarded him for a moment in silence. It struck him that her eyes were a queer gray-green—not the gray-green of water, but the gray-green of rock. What lay beneath their hardness he could not tell; but he knew that whatever it was, he did not like it.

Then, quite suddenly, the hard stare softened. Lil's eyes became liquid and luminous and appealing. Her red lips smiled winsomely at the man beside her. She remained leaning forward. Her eyes continued to hold him. She made a gesture with her right hand.

"You said you liked all this—these things—this room?" she queried.

"Sure do!"

She dropped her hand on his knee.

"And me? How much do you like me?"

Buff immediately broke into a gentle perspiration.

"I like you all right," he mumbled.

The lady laughed.

"Is that the best you can do?"

"I don't know what you mean," lied Buff, heartily wishing himself elsewhere, but lacking the nerve necessary to betake himself there.

"Don't you really know? Why do you suppose I brought you in here? Why do you suppose I've been doing everything in my power to make you notice me?"

Buff goggled at her.

"Wha-what?"

She impatiently nodded her head.

"Buff, do you mean to tell me you have never noticed my attempts to attract your attention?"

"No, I never," he declared hastily. "Honest! If you ain't got anything for me to do, I—"

"Wait!" Her hand upon his knee was compelling. "Don't be so shy. My Lord, if all men were as jumpy as you are! You're not afraid of me, are you?"

"N-n-no."

"Then sit still, Buff. Look at me. No, don't turn your eyes away. Buff, dear, you must know by this time how I feel toward you. You aren't so blind as all that. You can't be. Buff, I never thought I'd marry again—never; but—but—oh, why don't you help me out?"

Buff had not the remotest intention of helping her out. He would have arisen, but one of her hands was bearing down on his knee, while the other grasped his sleeve. The arm of the sofa, slightly curved, held him in on the left side. He was practically penned.

"I—I—" he stuttered, and bogged down like a horse in a quicksand; but he felt more like a steer in the squeezer.

The lady regarded him in silence for a moment, and then continued, in a more controlled tone:

"The Starlight has a good trade, Buff, and I have other interests that bring me in an income. With you as my husband, we'll go a long way. I need a man, and you are that man. Oh, you needn't shake your head at me! I know what I'm doing, and I know what I want. I want you. I—I love you, Buff — really and truly I do. Don't you believe it? Look at me! I'm as young as you are, and where will you find anybody better-looking? I'm true blue, Buff. I'll make you a good wife. I'll — I'll—if you don't love me now, Buff, marry me, and I'll make you love me. You don't know how I can love, Buff! Take me, oh, take me!"

Instead of waiting for him to take her, she took him. Before he could grasp her intention, she flung both arms around his neck and laid her lips to his.

No sooner did her mouth touch his than all nervousness left him. He became instantly cool and practical. With the utmost gentleness he reached back, took hold of her wrists, broke her grip, and forced her hands down into her lap. She gazed at him wide-eyed, open-mouthed.

"You mustn't do this," he told her. "You don't know what you're saying. We'll forget it, Lil."

He slipped out of his seat with a jingle of spur rowels, and reached for his hat. Lil was so silent that he glanced at her. She was sitting stiffly motionless, staring at him, her eyes blank, fixed, ophidian. A rattlesnake he had killed at Mulcher's Gap had looked at him with just such eyes.

"Then you don't want me?" she said in a dull, flat tone.

"I can't, Lil. Honest, I'd like to oblige you, but I can't."

She gave a short, hysterical laugh, and was across the room before he could bat an eye. One of his hands was on the door knob, but she jammed her foot against the door even as she threw both arms around his neck a second time.

"You don't mean it!" she whispered passionately, her breath hot on his chin. "Say you don't mean it, and I'll forgive you! Buff, I can make you happy—happier than any other woman can!"

But all her pleading left Buff as cold as perpetual snow. He felt that he was being made ridiculous. Manlike, he began to be angry.

"Stop it, Lil!" he told her, twisting himself loose from the clasp infolding his neck, and thrusting the lady from him. "I tell you you don't know what you're doing. You—you leave me alone!"

The lady stood off from him. Her hands were balled into fists. Her eyes were more reptilian than ever.

"I—I'll leave you alone!" she declared in a choking voice. "Yes, I will! You'll regret this the longest day you live! I'll see that you regret it, if it's the last thing I do! Get out!"

Buff required no second invitation.

"Deliver me!" he said inwardly, as he went to find his horse. "Is Lil crazy, or what is she?"

He tried to persuade himself that she must have been drunk, but his common sense told him that, allowing for the stress of her emotion, she had been as sober as the soberest justice in the land.

III

It must be borne in mind that these were the days before the West began to paint its houses; the days when there were more freight wagons than freight trains, and more stage coaches than passenger cars; when a nickel was often mentioned but rarely seen, and the tail went with the hide in any game you chose to play; when a horse cost either five dollars or the expenditure of a little exertion on a moonlight night; when there were three kinds of local law—the kind men bought, the kind they carried in their guns, and the kind whose conception has been attributed to the late Judge Lynch.

If those days were short on morals, they were long on life. People good, bad, and indifferent, male and female after their kind, lived and loved, hated and fought, as prodigally as ever they did in the days when chivalry was more than a name and the side arm was the sword. It was the heyday of the individual. Anything could happen.

Buff Warren, riding to McFluke's old place, regarded the scheme of existence with the vision of one who looks through a glass darkly. He was not sufficiently introspective to grasp the true significance of all that passed, but he was blessed, or cursed, with the flair for living of a Samuel Pepys, and this helped.

Not, of course, for a single instant, did he realize that he was a tiny chip in a current that was moving swiftly and resistlessly down to a shining sea. His eyes did not perceive the rocks that lay between, nor did his ears hear the roar of many waters—waters that would toss him high and drag him low, lash his soul, wrench his heart, twist his faith into a bitter mockery, and turn his happiness into dusty ashes.

Yet, could he have foreseen what the Three Sisters held in store for him, it is doubtful whether Buff Warren would have turned back. He was as courageous as a Bedlington terrier.

When he came within sight of the gray-brown log and shake shacks and stockade that had been McFluke's stables, shed, and corral, roosting on one end of a short ridge of ground slightly higher than the surrounding flat, he dragged the six-shooter from the holster on his leg and twirled the cylinder, making sure that every chamber but one held a cartridge. Easing down the hammer on the empty chamber, he rode on prepared for whatever might come.

He didn't believe that the nesters would show fight. They would obey orders fast enough. A poor-spirited lot, nesters!

He could not see the ranch house itself. It lay beyond the stable and corral, at the other end of the ridge and below the crest, where there was some protection from the winds that blew in winter.

The sun shone pleasantly, and the sky was as blue as a blond girl's eyes. The cottonwoods and willows that outlined with cool green the banks of the Lazy River, shivered and rustled in the breath of the baby breeze. The fair summer weather, combined with the natural beauty of the spot, would have enraptured a poet. Buff was not a poet, yet he saw that the place was good.

"Dunno that I blame 'em," he muttered, his watchful eyes fixed on the corral and stables. "That sure is just the place for a little ranch."

He walked his horse around the corral, circled the stables, and sighted the gray-brown roof of the ranch house lifting above the butt of the ridge. There was no smoke drifting from the chimney, but some one was chopping wood. He could plainly hear the clear smacks of the steel bit as it split the grain.

"Gil, is that you?"

The voice, which was as deep and rich as an organ tone, came from behind Buff. He checked his horse and turned his head.

He saw a man standing in the doorway of a stable—a man with white hair and a kindly, benevolent face. Here, obviously, was the head of the outfit.

Buff, noting that the ax had ceased to chunk, turned his horse and rode toward the man in the doorway. One of the man's hands rested on the door jamb, the other held a cane.

"Is that you, Gil?" asked the man again.

Buff wondered. The man was looking directly at him.

"No," he said, pulling up in front of the stable door. "I ain't Gil. You living here?"

The man smiled. His face was clean-shaven, and Buff wondered at the extraordinary gentleness of his kindly expression. It made the cowboy feel vaguely uncomfortable. It was as if he had been detected in an act of meanness.

"Yes," said the man in his deep, rich tones. "We are living here. What can I do for you, sir?"

Buff did not reply. He was lost in contemplation of the man's eyes. Not only were they, in their way, as unusual as the stranger's voice—for, in sharp contrast with the bushy white eyebrows above them, they were remarkably black and lustrous—but they were apparently fixed on a point above Buff's hat.

There was something unnaturally stiff about the man's neck and the upward tilt of his chin. His hand dropped from the door jamb, and he took a step forward, the cane touching the ground in front of him as he moved.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he said again, his face upturned, his eyes still fixed on a point above Buff's head.

Moved by a sudden impulse, Buff leaned from the saddle and swept his hand in front of the other's face. The man did not move as the shadow crossed his black eyes. Buff sat up very straight. He knew, now, what was the matter. The man was blind.

Never in all his life had he felt more like a yellow dog. It was one thing to bid a hale and hearty nester to flit; it was quite another to give such orders to this blind man.

He looked down at the man in silence. He was thinking. His thoughts raced, but notwithstanding that they almost tumbled over themselves, they clearly indicated the fence between whose sides he must choose.

On one side was the custom of the country—the custom he knew, and to which he subscribed as naturally as he breathed. On this side practically all his friends were ranged, in company with that formidable tyrant, public opinion. His life, his habits, his mode of living, everything inclined Buff to this side.

On the other stood this blind man—alone. Of course, the sound of the ax betokened the presence of a wife, and perhaps of children, but Buff did not think of them. He considered only the case of the man before him.

The smile had faded from the lips of the blind man. His face sharpened with a sudden anxiety.

" Who are you?" he asked. " Why don't you speak?"

He did not speak sharply. He did not raise his voice. He stood there, waiting for the other to answer. It struck Buff that this was what the man would be doing to the end of his days—waiting on the pleasure of some one else. In that instant he made his choice.

" What is the matter?" asked the blind man, his anxiety creeping into his voice.

" Nothing's the matter," replied Buff, giving tongue at last. " My name's Warren. What might I call you, sir?"

The blind man's face cleared as if by magic. His smile returned. He shifted his stick and held out his right hand.

" Glad to know you, Mr. Warren. My name's Fair—Abijah Fair. Won't you strip and hobble and come down to the house? Dinner will be ready soon."

Buff hesitated. He was minded to refuse. Although he had made his choice, and no longer felt like a yellow dog, that humiliating sensation had been replaced by one of sulky resentment toward the man who had made his choice necessary.

He knew, however, that what he had started he must see through. This man and his family must be warned of what they might expect; for Caltrop would send another man—several, probably.

" I was wondering what was the matter with me," said Buff. " When you said dinner, I knew I was hungry. Be right with you!"

He hobbled his horse and slipped off saddle and bridle. While he was spreading his sweaty saddle blanket over his saddle, he saw a bareheaded woman coming from the direction of the ranch house. She carried an ax over her shoulder. Buff thought she had the weariest-looking face he had ever seen.

When she came close to the blind man, she said:

" What is it, dear? I heard you talking, and—"

Her voice trailed off, as she took his white, slender hand in her square, blunt-fingered one.

" This is Mr. Warren, Dora," said Fair. " My wife, Mr. Warren."

Buff straightened, jerked off his hat, came forward, and shook hands. Mrs. Fair gave him a firm grip and a slow smile. Her eyes were as brown as a spaniel's, with the steadfast, questioning look in them that abides in the eyes of those whose paths have been briery and rough.

" He's taking dinner with us, Dora," continued Fair.

" Then we'd better go down to the house," his wife suggested hospitably. " It's cooler indoors."

Fair held her hand as they walked along slowly, and Buff marked how cleverly she guided him around or over the inequalities of the ground. Once he turned his head stiffly in Buff's direction.

" I can't walk very fast," said he. " I don't see as well as I might."

And the man stone blind, as Buff knew!

The cowboy experienced an odd constriction of his throat. He coughed before he spoke.

" Don't have to walk fast on my account. I never do myself."

A faint, irregular thumping noise drifted to Buff's ears. It sounded like some one beating a carpet. The sounds seemed to come from beyond the ranch house.

When they reached the end of the ridge, and the level ground beyond the house became visible, Buff stopped short as if he had been shot. If he had been shot, it is doubtful whether he could have been more unpleasantly surprised. For there, dark brown against the green, lay a good six-acre rectangle of plowed ground. At one corner of the rectangle the plow, with its doubletree hanging drunkenly askew, stood in a furrow.

A plow! Buff had left the stony hill farm in Pennsylvania because of the monotony of plowing and harrowing. He had come to the cow country, where there were no plows, and where, please God, there never would be any plows; and here was a plow that had already turned under six acres! It was too much.

True, other nesters here and there had started their bits of truck patches before being definitely run out of the country; but none of them had used plows, and their patches had been comparatively insignificant. The ambitious enterprise before Buff's eyes was considerably more than the cowboy had bargained for. Not only was the blind man a nester, he was that unspeakable object, a granger.

Buff suddenly became conscious that the Fairs had halted, and that Mrs. Fair was regarding him with some curiosity.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

Buff took a long breath.

"Nothing," he said, stepping out quickly. "I just happened to think of something, but it doesn't matter. You—you're going to have quite a garden."

"That's going to be more than a garden," said Mrs. Fair, as they walked on. "That's going to be an eight-acre field of corn. We want to get a crop in for winter feed. The garden's in front of the house. You can't see it from here, but you can hear it."

"Hear it?"

"The twins are beating sod."

Buff nodded. That thumping noise! He had once beaten sod for a week, when his father made an addition to their garden. Whack, whack, whack! Shake the grass and throw it aside! Repeat the operation world without end! Yes, indeed—he knew all about the infernal business.

"Step up here, father," said Mrs. Fair, at the kitchen door.

Buff followed them into the kitchen. A long-legged girl of sixteen was standing over the four-hole stove. She was barefooted, snub-nosed, red-headed, and it is doubtful whether another freckle could have been crowded upon her cheerful countenance. She wore her red hair in two long pigtails that flapped about when she moved—which she was doing continually.

"Here's your chair, father," said Mrs. Fair, guiding her husband to a hickory armchair standing between the windows.

"It's the turning that throws me out, Dora," Fair said apologetically. "Those two extra steps have me fooled still; but I'll get it in time."

"Of course you will," Mrs. Fair told him heartily. "You're doing fine. My, the way you get around by yourself!" She slipped an arm around the waist of the girl at the stove, who had been viewing the stranger with the utmost interest. "This is my daughter Jemima, Mr. Warren."

Jemima held out a moist palm and shook hands gravely.

"I'm glad to see you. It's nice to have company."

Buff mumbled something unintelligible, and shuffled his helpless feet. He knew that his face was redder than beetroot. Mrs. Fair saw his distress, and pointed to a chair beside the door.

"Sit down, Mr. Warren," she invited, with her pleasant smile. "Smoke, if you want to."

Buff was glad to do both. Mr. Fair joined him with a pipe.

"See anything of Gil yet, mother?" asked Jemima, dipping a wooden spoon into a salt sack.

"Not yet."

"Gil's been gone a long time."

"It's a big country," struck in Mr. Fair. "I expect Juniper must have traveled some distance."

"I'd travel him!" Jemima cried vindictively, fiercely stirring the contents of the large saucepan. "That animal ain't—isn't worth powder to blow him up!"

"Oh, yes, he is, daughter," Mr. Fair contradicted judicially. "Oh, yes, he is. He'll pull his share of the load every time. You can't hitch him wrong, and he gets into his stride on a cold collar quicker than any—look out, Jem! Hominy's boiling over!"

"I declare, father," exclaimed Jemima admiringly, as she moved the saucepan, "you can hear with your ears quicker than I can see with my eyes!"

The blind face flushed with pleasure at the compliment.

"I'm getting so I can hear pretty well—better than I used to, a lot; but I kind of saw it a little, too, I think."

"Of course you did, father," corroborated Jemima, rushing across to her parent and giving him a brisk hug. "Your eyes are getting better every day—I know they are."

As she turned back to the stove, Buff saw that her eyes were shining and her young mouth was oddly set. Mrs. Fair bent over the wood box. She seemed to be hunting for something in the bottom. Once she passed her hand quickly across her eyes.

Buff cleared his throat; and with that action, he swallowed, as it were, the plow.

IV

Buff cocked a surprised eyebrow.

"Milk? Real milk?"

"Real milk!" Jemima mimicked his tone to perfection. "And that's cream—for the coffee, you know. You pour it in and stir it around. It gives it a better flavor."

"Jemima!" exclaimed Mrs. Fair. "Mr. Warren is our guest."

Jemima winked at the guest.

"We understand each other, don't we?"

The guest winked back.

"You bet we do. Old friends, we are!"

The twins stared at Buff with solemn, twelve-year-old eyes. Their names were Bob and Bill, diminutives for Robert and Wilhemina. Since both wore boy's style overalls, and their faces were amusingly alike, it was impossible for the casual passer-by to tell them apart.

"We're going to raise beets, carrots, onions, and cabbage in our garden," said one twin to Buff.

"And butter beans, string beans, and green corn," chanted the other.

"I wish I was going to help you," said Buff, and meant it, too.

"We've got a red cow, a red calf, ten heifers, and a bull," said the first twin.

"Do you know how to milk?" asked the second twin.

"Yes," replied Buff, recalling the innumerable times he had squatted on a milking stool and rammed his forehead into a cow's flank. "I sure do know how to milk, all right!"

Milking had been another reason for his leaving home. In his index of distasteful enterprises, milking ranked below plowing.

"You got to do lots of milking, I guess," remarked the first twin.

"I never do any at all," said Buff.

Both twins wrinkled their foreheads. They were pleasant-faced youngsters, with brown eyes and hair.

"Ain't you a cowboy?" they inquired simultaneously.

Buff nodded.

"Something like that."

"But don't you milk your cows none—any, I mean?" demanded the first twin.

"You see, they ain't milking cows," explained Buff. "They're eating cows."

"What's the difference between a milking cow and an eating cow?" the twins wished to know.

"There, there, children, that 'll do," interrupted Mrs. Fair. "Give Mr. Warren a chance to eat his meal in peace. Another cup of coffee, Mr. Warren?"

It was excellent coffee. Buff had another cup. When the dried apple pie was put on the table, he had a third cup to wash down his piece.

After the meal, when he had taken his chair back to the side wall opposite the doorway, for a smoke, the twins attacked him again. The difference between a milking cow and an eating cow had to be explained; so, while they stood one on each side of him, he cleared up the mist that befogged their youthful minds.

"And that's how it is," he concluded, and looked up—looked up into the face of the pretty girl with honey-colored hair and amber eyes, the girl who had made him think of home and the blue Pennsylvania hills and cowbells and mountain laurel and honeyshucks.

But she did not make him think of those things now; for, as she stood squarely in the doorway, it might almost be said that she glared at him. Certainly there was no hint of sweetness in those amber eyes. Rather there was plenty of fire. Her curved brows—it suddenly struck Buff that they were several shades darker than her hair, and that the effect was not unpleasing—were drawn together in an unmistakable scowl.

Mr. and Mrs. Fair had gone into another room, but Jemima and the twins were still in the kitchen. The children stared wonderingly at the girl in the doorway, but not so Jemima. She promptly stepped forward to do the honors.

"Gil," said she, indicating Buff with the plate she was wiping, "this is Mr. Warren. Mr. Warren, my sister."

Gil did not move, and her eyes lost none of their hostility.

Buff had risen to his feet. He smiled. The girl did not smile. For a long thirty seconds she stared—stared him up and down as if he were a strange creature of unpleasant habits and ancestry. Then she tossed her head and moved aside, leaving the doorway open.

"Get out!" she ordered.

"Gil!" cried Jemima, springing in front of her. "What's the matter with you? Have you gone crazy?"

"No, I haven't gone crazy, but I guess you must have, to let that man in here. Get out of my way!"

So saying, this young lady of action put forth a hand and plucked a rifle from behind the door.

"Now," she added, cocking the hammer, "you going to leave?"

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed Buff sharply. "Haven't you any better sense than to monkey with a gun with kids in the room? Put that gun down, and then I'll go."

But the girl did not put the gun down. She threw it up to her shoulder.

"Go on!" she commanded, her voice hoarse with rage. "Flit!"

It was then that the twins, who had stood dumb and motionless, came to life with a rush. They tore out of the kitchen, yelling for their mother at the top of their lungs.

Jemima did not run from the room. She ran in front of Buff. Her face was pale under her freckles, and her voice shook as she cried:

"You're not going to shoot him! You're not! Mother, mother, come quick!"

Buff thrust his hands under Jemima's armpits and gently lifted her to one side.

"No call to get all fussed up," said he. "I was just going, anyway."

He was halfway to the door when Mrs. Fair hurried into the kitchen, the wildly excited twins in her wake.

"Put down that gun, Gil!" she ordered.

"I won't!" snapped her daughter, keeping the barrel trained on Buff during his progress to the door. "If that man doesn't get out quick, I'll shoot him!"

"Not with that gun," Mrs. Fair said dryly. "I unloaded it this morning. Put it back where it belongs. Please wait, Mr. Warren. I want to get at the bottom of this."

Buff paused on the threshold. Gil grounded the rifle with a thud and slammed it behind the door.

"That's better," commented Mrs. Fair. "What makes you act this way, Gil?"

"Mother," replied Gil, almost weeping with rage, and pointing a tragic finger at Buff, "hasn't that man said anything?"

"Said anything!" repeated Mrs. Fair. "He stayed to dinner and talked with us, if that's what you mean."

"You actually fed him?"

"I don't know why I shouldn't!" said her mother sharply. "It seems to me, Gil, you've taken leave of your senses. What you need is a good big drink of sassafras tea."

"No, I don't, either, and I don't care if you have given in! I haven't, and I won't! I won't! I'm going to stay right here, if I die for it! They shan't run me off—I tell you that!"

"You needn't stamp your foot at me, young lady," Mrs. Fair told her calmly. "I'm glad to hear that you won't give in, even if I have, but I don't know yet what you're talking about."

"Didn't that man tell you to get out of this place?"

Mrs. Fair shook her head.

"He's been very polite."

"If he hasn't told you yet, he will. That's what he came for. You know that nice girl that stopped by here yesterday—Rainbow Fernald? I met her this morning, and she told me about this man. She described him exactly, and she said he'd been sent by the owner of the Eighty-Eight to tell us to leave, and if we wouldn't quit they'd drive us out. Oh, mother, mother, it's always move on, move on, move on, and I thought we'd found a home at last!"

The mother moved swiftly to her daughter's side.

"There, there, deary," she said quietly, slipping an arm around her daughter's waist. "You settle right down. That's right! You had me good and scared for a minute. I tell you, Gil, I'm too old for such goings on. Don't you do it again!"

Gone was the wild rage of the girl. She was just a young thing now, glad of her mother's nearness. She dabbed a shirt sleeve across her eyes.

"All the same, you ask him about—what I said."

"I intend to." There was a grim note in Mrs. Fair's voice. "Is there anything in what my daughter said, Mr. Warren?"

Buff Warren stood and fumbled with his hat. He was in the throes of exactly the emotion suffered by a man about to pay a visit to the dentist. He wished that the earth would open and receive him into its midst, or that he could instantaneously drop dead. He was red to the ears. His skin prickled all over. He scraped his feet till his spur rowels rattled like castanets.

"Well?" said Mrs. Fair.

Buff raised his head. Jemima had taken post at her mother's side. Her brown eyes held a hurt look—the look that comes in a friendly dog's eyes when it is shoved away or kicked. The twins were gazing at him, too. Hostility was in their stare.

"It's true," said he bluntly. "I was sent here to tell you people to drag it."

Jemima drew a quick breath.

"Why didn't you tell us, then?"

"I changed my mind."

"Changed your mind?" said Jemima.

He nodded uncomfortably.

"You see, when I rode in here and saw what kind of folks you were, and—and all like that, you understand, I—I—it struck me all of a heap there wasn't any real reason why you didn't have as much right here as the next fellah. I'll have nothing to do with running you off."

"There, now, I knew it!" Jemima exclaimed in ecstatic accents.

"It's a trick!" rebutted Gil with equal promptness.

"You think so?" Buff grinned. The situation was his, and he knew it. "I'll call that bluff. I take it you found the mule you were looking for. You did? Good enough! Where is he? And the other one—he with him? Fine! Jemima, do you know where the team harness is?"

Jemima's eyes were dancing. So were her feet.

"I'll show you. Come on!"

Buff pulled on his hat, and turned to follow. On the doorstep he paused long enough to poke his head round the door jamb and say:

"If you folks will come outdoors in about ten minutes, I'll give you a first-class imitation of a young man and two mules plowing up that going-to-be cornfield!"

V

"Come, all you jolly plowboys! Come, listen to my lays
And join with me in chorus! I'll sing the plowboy's praise.
My song is of the plowboy's fame,
And to you I'll relate the same;
He whistles, sings, and drives his team, the brave plowing bo-o-oy!"

Thus sang Rainbow, in a soft and rich contralto. She flung a booted leg around her saddlehorn and leaned forward to watch Buff skate his plow out on the trampled grass at the end of the furrow.

"You did that well," she said critically. "I expect you must have been a hilltop Reuben at one time. I'm surprised at you—I am indeed; and you with such an innocent face!"

Buff leaned on a plow handle and looked the lady over.

"I don't know you," he said finally. "I never saw you before."

"There are thirty-six verses to that song," threatened the Rainbow.

"In that case, I'm pleased to make your acquaintance," Buff surrendered hastily. "Uh—nice day!"

"Good plowing weather," observed Rainbow.

"Don't rub it in, Rainbow. You know I always was your friend. You be a good girl, now, and ride away on your little pink horse, and next time I see you I'll give you one great, big, round, juicy lollypop."

"You'll give me one great, big, round, juicy split-ear bridle, that's what you'll give me!" cried the outraged Rainbow. "You'll pay your bets, young fellah, and don't you forget it."

Buff delicately cupped a hand at his ear.

"What's that? Bet? Oh, yes, Bet! Pretty name, Bet! I once knew a girl of that name, back East somewhere. Used to call her Betty. She had laughing hair and curly eyes and the most taking ways you ever saw. She was all right to me, though. I never missed anything but my watch. Outside of that—"

Rainbow began to weep noisily, and knuckled her pretty eyes.

"Boohoo! I want my bridle, I do! The hand-carved split-ear, with the silver bit and rein chains, and the silver buckle, and the silver conchas, and seven-foot reins, and—"

"What on earth is the matter?" broke in the voice of Gilian Fair, who had come up unnoticed.

She stood and stared at the other girl in astonishment. Rainbow turned a laughing face toward her, and Buff cut in with—

"It's just her joke, Miss Fair. She's always funning with folks. Don't you mind her. I expect she wasn't licked regular when she was young."

Rainbow grinned. She knew that Buff intended to pay the bet, and she knew that he knew that she knew it; so she dropped an eyelid at him, and said to Miss Fair, with the most innocent air in the world:

"We had a bet on. I won, and now he's trying to get out of paying it. Aren't men the shortest sports?"

"What were you betting about?" dodged Gil.

"A quirt goes with that bridle," thrust in Buff, before Rainbow could make reply.

Rainbow affected to ignore him completely.

"We made a bet that—"

"*And* a pair of spurs!" Buff cried in desperation.

Rainbow affected to hesitate.

"Silver inlaid?"

Buff gulped at this, and then, as the lady opened her mouth again, he made instant capitulation.

"Silver-inlaid, hand-carved leathers, and glass rosettes."

"Good enough!"

"But what *was* the bet?" demanded the mystified Miss Fair.

"The bet?" repeated Rainbow, and openly gave Buff a reassuring nod. "Oh, he bet his horse could beat mine, and I beat him. Not much of a bet!"

"I'd call it a pretty fair bet," said Gil—"all that silver-inlaid truck."

"I've got to keep going," said Buff, "if I'm going to get an acre under before sundown!"

Rainbow watched him go straddling away on his high-heeled boots, watched him swing the plow upright, watched him start a fresh furrow, and said to Miss Fair, a dancing devil in her black eyes:

"You've hired a good hand there!"

Miss Fair shook her honey-colored head.

"We haven't hired him. We can't afford a man. I wish we could!"

"Then how—"

Miss Fair explained hurriedly, and the half-breed girl listened in silence. When Gilian had said her say, Rainbow nodded absently.

"He's a good-hearted boy," she observed; "but there's only one of him. They'll send somebody else—several somebody elses. You knew I warned you what would happen," she added, as her listener's face clouded.

"I know you did, but—but somehow I keep hoping. We've got a legal right here," said Gil, with a flash of her amber-colored eyes.

"But they don't think so; and they—" Rainbow did not complete the sentence.

"They've got the power," Miss Fair assented wearily. "I suppose they own the sheriff."

"Body, soul, and roll!"

"No help there!"

"Not a bit; but there's Dolan."

"Who's he?"

"County judge—and an odd number. Nobody can say he owns him, and he jumps whichever way he likes. Always has, and always will. A cold proposition, too. So far he's always been on the side of the cattlemen, because the nesters we've had around here were a rustling bunch of jiggers, and he wasn't wasting any sympathy on them; but you people are different."

"Thank you," Miss Fair remarked dryly.

"I'm not throwing bouquets," said Rainbow, "I'm stating facts. Dolan might help, if he knew the facts."

"I'm not going whining to any judge, and that's flat. If we can't get justice without telling all our private affairs, then we don't want justice. We'll rub along the best we can without it."

"I—er—I didn't mean you," said the Rainbow awkwardly, if anything that the naturally graceful girl said or did could be awkward. "I didn't mean you. *I* know the judge. Now, listen, honey—don't get mad! I want to help all I can."

Gilian Fair laid her hand on Rainbow's knee and smiled up into her face.

"I've only known you four days, but I feel as if I'd known you all my life. We're friends, and we're going to keep on being friends; but don't you say anything to the judge about us—about how we're fixed, and all. We're not looking for sympathy. Promise, Rainbow?"

Rainbow boarded her last card.

"I was over at the Eighty-Eight to-day. I didn't want to tell you. Mame's my friend, and it seemed like spying, sort of; but I don't care. When I was passing the office door on my way home, I heard Caltrop. He was swearing about what he'd do. I only told you the half of it when I said more of the boys would be sent here to run you off. Caltrop is aiming to burn your buildings, run off your stock, and burn your traps and wagons. He's fixing to set you plumb afoot. 'A shining example to the nesters' is what he says."

Miss Fair's face blanched. Then her chin stiffened.

"I wonder if they think we'll take all that sitting down!"

"What can you do?"

"I can shoot—a little. So can mother."

Rainbow shook her head.

"That would be the worst thing you could do. It would make 'em mad for nothing. You wouldn't gain anything by trying to use a gun—not a thing. I talked to Mame. She said she'd speak to her husband, but—"

"I wish you hadn't said a word to her," interrupted Gilian. "We're not beggars, and we certainly don't want sympathy from anybody whose husband is trying to run us off."

"Now, listen, dear," said Rainbow, trying hard to hold down her none too equable temper. "Better let me drop a word in the judge's ear, anyway."

"Promise me you won't say a word to him or to any one else," Miss Fair insisted.

"Oh, all right!" Thus said Rainbow pettishly. "If I'd known you were going to act this way, I'd never have told you a single word. I think you're making a big mistake, Gil. You'll need all the help you can get."

"Help you have to whine for isn't worth much. If it comes to the worst, and they jump us, I'll go to the judge and ask for the protection and redress we're legally entitled to; but I certainly am not going to him now, and I shan't go at all if I can help it."

Rainbow gathered up her reins.

"Gil, you're too damned proud for any human use, and if I stay here any longer you and I'll fight. So long!"

VI

Buff Warren, riding away from the Fair place, pushed a hand into his trouser pocket and withdrew it slowly. He tentatively jingled what lay within his closed fingers, then opened his hand and critically regarded the three pieces of silver that adorned his palm.

"One dollar and six bits," he said aloud. "To a young fellah starting out to buy a paper of pins and a short drink, it looks like a million dollars; but to the same young fellah owing a bill for a hand-carved split-ear and branching out to start a home and fireside, it's a mighty small button on a mighty big shirt!" He sighed, and carefully slid the three pieces of silver back into his pocket. "Boy," he said to the waggling ears of his mount, "take warning! Say your prayers every night, save your money, play your cards close to your belt, and walk in the middle of the road. Never do business with a personal friend unless you're sure you know more about the business than the personal friend does, and remember that hereafter—

"We sell no trash,
We sell for cash—
  To trust is very risky;
And he who trusts
And never busts
  Puts water in his whisky.

"Bear that in mind, little hoss, and it 'll be money in your pocket!" Buff pushed his hat back, rasped the back of his hand across his forehead, and went on in an entirely different tone: "Speaking of horses, I'd admire to know how I'm to leave the ranch—on foot, or on a borrowed horse!"

For Buff Warren did not own a horse. Besides what he stood up in and the saddle he sat upon, he had title to little of this world's goods. The pressing problem as to means of future transportation occupied him for a time. Then he dismissed it for thoughts far pleasanter, and broke into another snatch of song.

In the dusk of twilight he dismounted at the Eighty-Eight corral. As his right foot touched the ground, he swore under his breath. With extreme tenderness he lowered the left foot from the stirrup to the ground.

"Blistered!" he groaned. "I'll bet they're raw like skun beef. It 'll be a surprise to me if I can get my boots off without using a knife." He took a step and groaned again. "And my legs have stiffened up on me. I'll feel real good to-morrow morning!"

The condition of Buff's feet and legs is not to be wondered at. Totally unaccustomed to walking, his feet incased in tight-fitting, high-heeled cowboy boots, he had that afternoon covered eight or nine miles at the tail of a plow. Buff had sufficient reason to be apprehensive of his probable condition on the morrow.

Carrying his saddle, bridle, and blanket, he wended his limping way toward the bunk house. Here, in the kitchen, Jimmy, the cook, was bawling the heartsome ditty of "The Zebra Dun."

"Dried apple pies!" muttered Buff, cheering up a trifle, for he liked dried apple pies almost as well as he liked those filled with the delectable raisin. Then it occurred to him that he might not be on hand at the consuming of the pies. He was not depressed, however. There were compensations.

Jimmy was a methodical person. When baking pies he always sang "The Zebra Dun." He kneaded dough to the tune of "The Mormon Bishop's Lament," and washed dishes to the inspiring strains of "Dan Taylor."

Buff wondered what kind of a meal Jimmy would set before a late comer. It was long past supper time.

A shadow came upon Buff, and halted.

"My childhood friend and boon companion," said the shadow, "let me tell you a joke."

"Look here, Bill," Buff replied, with suspicion, for he knew the shadow's little ways. "Look here, William, if you're fixing to get frivolous with me, go around the other way. No fooling!"

"'No fooling,'" echoed his cousin. "This is a real joke, and you're it."

"How?" Buff demanded with savage patience, shifting his bridle arm.

Holliday noted the movement, and stepped neatly out of range.

"Easy with the hardware, Buffy! The joke is that you're tripping to the kitchen all set for a meal. That's half of the joke. The other half is that you ain't goin' to get the meal."

"Jimmy on one of his tantrums?"

"My Gawd, yes! Wouldn't even gimme a couple of doughnuts a while ago."

"But he's singing 'The Zebra Dun,' happy as a drunkard."

"That don't mean anything except he's making dried apple pies. Oh, he's on the prod worse'n a cow."

Buff looked speculatively at his cousin, for his brain had suddenly conceived an idea. Bill Holliday owned a good horse. He likewise possessed the sum of fifty dollars in cash.

"What do you want to bet Jimmy don't give me a meal?"

"Huh?"

"I'll bet you Jimmy will gimme porterhouse steak, fried potatoes, coffee, pie, cake, and doughnuts—all I want to eat—when I ask him."

Bill laid an earnest hand upon Buff's arm.

"Buffy, you go see a doctor quick. Your brain is mushin' up."

"You're afraid to bet me—that's what's the matter with you!"

"No, I ain't."

"Put up or shut up!"

"There's a string to this," dodged Bill. "You'll lam Jimmy over the head or something, and get your own supper."

"No, I won't, either. Jimmy will give me porterhouse steak, round frieds, coffee, pie, cake, and doughnuts when I ask him. Of course, I may have to ask him more than once."

"I guess you will sort of have to—with a club."

"Clubs are barred. I'll use my tongue only."

"You won't try to wrastle it out of him?" Bill asked doubtfully. "And you'll make him give you all the truck you said?"

"No wrastling, and he'll give me what I said of his own free will."

"If he don't give you all that truck—*all* of it, mind—I win?"

"You'll win, but we haven't made the bet yet."

"Ten dollars even."

"Chicken feed! Make it a worth-while bet. Lessee, now—I got it. My saddle against your horse, Buster."

"Aw, Buster's a good horse!"

"It's a good saddle—worth forty as is."

"Buster's worth sixty, any day. He's only going on five. He's fast, strong, and the best cutting pony on the range."

"That's why I want him. What you growling about? If Jimmy's on the prod like you say he is, you ought to give me odds; but I'll sweeten it some. Add thirty-five dollars cash money to the horse, and I'll put my ivory-handled six-shooter on the blanket. You know you've been wanting that six-shooter a long time."

"I haven't been wanting it thirty-five dollars' worth. Make it thirty!"

"It's a bet," said Buff swiftly.

"Horse and thirty dollars against your saddle and six-shooter. You to use your tongue only. Time limit, half an hour."

"Nothing was said about a time limit," exclaimed the properly indignant Buff.

"The bet's off."

"Make it forty-five minutes, then. Gimme a chance for my money."

"Mine, you mean. Forty-five goes. I'll just go along with you and stick outside on the wash bench and listen to you work James."

"I wish you would. I want you to listen. Maybe you'll learn something. Come on!"

Buff dropped his saddle and bridle at the kitchen door, and entered. Jimmy paused in his labors long enough to give him a frown of supreme disapproval.

"What do you think this is—a restaurant?" he yapped. "I thought, when I quit the Bar S and come over here, I'd be shut of you fellers; but no, you and that Bill Holliday got to quit too and follow me here inside a month, just to plague me!"

"You're exaggeratin', James," declared Buff, with amazing meekness. "We had a run-in with Old Salt, same as you did. We naturally had to quit. And where, I ask you, would you expect us to find another job? Why, at the Eighty-Eight, where our old friend James is dishing out his well-known fare."

"I ain't your old friend," growled Jimmy; "and if your majesty thinks he can come traipsing in at midnight and get anything to eat, he's got another guess comin'. I'm a good-natured man, I am, but I got enough to do fillin' the hay-bellies of ten good-for-nothin' punchers three times a day—"

"That makes two hundred and ten hay-bellies a week," cut in Buff, sliding into the nearest chair.

"Without scratching up short orders at odd times," Jimmy went on. "You can stick a pin in that, Buff Warren!"

"How you do run on!" murmured Buff. "I want my supper, James."

"There's no law against wantin'."

"I want my supper."

"Take a lap in your waistband."

"I want my supper."

"Can't you say nothin' else? You remind me of a cuckoo clock my old aunt had once. She was always repeatin' herself thataway. When she was wound up good, she'd say 'Cuckoo' three hundred times without stopping."

"Weren't you scared?"

"Scared? Why should I be scared?"

"Well, if I had an aunt that said 'Cuckoo' three hundred times without stopping, I'd be scared. Sometimes folks like that get real violent. Tell me some more about that aunt. Did she have any other symptoms?"

"Look here, Buff Warren!" began Jimmy dangerously. "If you're going to insult my relations—"

"Insult your relations!" cried Buff. "Me? Why, James, old firecracker, I *like* your relations. I admire 'em. I even like and admire you. What could be fairer than that?"

Buff hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest and beamed upon Jimmy.

"All the same," grunted Jimmy, picking up the rolling pin, "you don't get a thing to eat."

"Would you turn a starving man from your door?"

"I'd turn a long, lazy lump of slumgullion from my door—that's what I'd do!"

"All right for you!" Buff remarked, removing his thumbs from the armholes of his vest, and steepling his fingers with ministerial dignity. "All right for you! I was in Farewell last Monday. I ate at Lainey's, but I ain't saying who asked after you."

Jimmy looked uncertainly at Buff. He thrust out his tongue and lower lip, retired from view one end of his mustache and chewed it thoughtfully. The movements of the rolling pin became slower and slower. Finally they ceased altogether.

Jimmy stood up and rubbed the small of his back with a floury hand. That part of his mustache which had vanished now made its reappearance. Jimmy smiled.

"In Farewell last Monday, huh?" said he in dulcet tones. "And at the hotel! Did—"

"Not a word, James," Buff said. "I ain't sayin' a word. You've treated me mean. My heart's broke."

"Aw, quit your foolin', Buffy! Listen here—did you see—"

"I'm so hungry I don't remember," wailed Buffy, rubbing the outside of his aching void.

"I'll bet you didn't go to the hotel at all!"

"I'm satisfied if you are. Windy Taylor, he was eating there, too."

Windy Taylor was Jimmy's hated rival.

"What did he have to say to her?" he demanded.

Buff cast his eyes ceilingward.

"He said — he said — lemme see, now, what was it he said? Something about—about—well, I declare, James, if I ain't forgot!"

"Forgot!" yapped Jimmy. "You can't have forgot! Think, man, think!"

"If I could wrap myself around a bit of porterhouse steak and round frieds and coffee, and maybe a piece of pie, cake, and some doughnuts to top off with, maybe I could remember."

Jimmy hesitated. Buff watched him through half closed eyes whose lids masked keenest interest.

"Well," said Jimmy slowly, "it's just

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dumb luck I've got a porterhouse. I was saving it for myself, but—"

He made an eloquent gesture, and reached for a frying pan.

Within twenty minutes Buff was hitching up his chair to the kitchen table.

"Well, well!" said he, in loud, cheerful tones calculated to reach the ear of a listener lurking on the wash bench. "As I live and breathe, porterhouse steak, round frieds, and coffee! Is that cake? It is cake, good cake, and this is the doughnut family. Welcome, little strangers! And a piece of pie. Don't apologize, James. I know the apple pies won't be ready till tomorrow. This peach pie will do fine. The whole layout's worth thirty dollars of any man's money. Thirty wheels—count 'em—thirty. Let's go!"

Entered then Mr. Bill Holliday, who thrust into Buff's willing hand three yellow disks that chinked pleasantly as they were transferred.

"What I owe you," said Bill briefly. "You'll find the horse in the night trap."

"That's what I call right clever of you, William," acknowledged Buff. "Won't you join me? No? In that case I'll see you later—"

So saying, Buff Warren picked up knife and fork and squared his shoulders to the task before him.

"And if I were you, Jimmy," said Buff in conclusion, "I wouldn't lose any sleep over that hasher and Windy Taylor. Didn't I tell you what she said about you? Well, then!"

"I guess you're right," Jimmy pronounced beatifically. "Have another piece of pie?"

Buff patted his stomach and shook a regretful head.

"Not a speck of room. Sorry! But if you could gimme some of that pet salve of yours for a blis—for a small cut I've got on my leg, I'd be real grateful."

VII

"WHAT you limping for?" demanded Sam Caltrop, when Buff entered the office next morning.

"Sprained my ankle," was the laconic reply.

"Blistered your heels, you mean," chuckled Caltrop. "You've been walking. What's the matter—horse throw you or something?"

Buff's blue eyes narrowed slightly.

"Horses don't throw me and folks don't ride me—much."

"Huh? Oh, hell, Buff, tuck in your claws! Did you haze those nesters off like I told you?"

"Who—me?"

"Yes, you. Who else? Did you?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't."

"You didn't! You didn't! Why didn't you?"

"I didn't feel like it, because that nester is blind."

"You've got more nerve than a sore tooth to come in here independent as a hawg on ice and try to give me any such excuse as that! I can't help whether he's blind or not. What really happened? Nesters run you off?"

Buff's upper lip lifted in a toothy smile, but his eyes were sufficiently frosty.

"Speakin' plain and man to man, just so you won't get any wrong ideas in your noddle, I'd like to mention once more that I didn't feel like it, because he's blind. I don't like to repeat myself. If folks would keep their ears open, it wouldn't be necessary to say a thing twice."

Sam Caltrop sat back in his chair and positively goggled at his employee. What on earth was biting the invariably even-tempered Warren? Couldn't he take a joke? Or what was the matter?

"Look here, Buff!" said Caltrop. "This riddle's too much for me. I'll bite. Give it a name."

"No riddle about it. I quit yesterday morning. You might as well give me my time."

Here was something Caltrop could understand. He turned at once to his desk, and routed out pencil and paper.

"Yesterday morning," he repeated, looking at Buff. "Why not this morning?"

"Because I was plowing for that nester most of yesterday."

Caltrop blinked, swallowed, and blinked again.

"What's that? Say it again!"

"You heard me the first time."

"If I heard you correctly you'll *walk* off this ranch!" Caltrop announced, with venom. "No man plowing"—he fairly spat the word—"for a nester can borrow any horse of mine!"

"I wouldn't think of borrowing from you. I wouldn't think of walking off the ranch, either. I'd rather ride."

"Not on one of my horses!"

"One of mine."

"You ain't got one."

"Your mistake. That yellah Buster horse, he's mine."

"That's so—Bill Holliday owns Buster, doesn't he? Well, if he lends you Buster, he's fired!"

"Shucks, you don't want to do that! Bill's a top hand. Besides, I won Buster off him last night; so I won't have to do any walking. Hurts your feet, walking does. About my time, now—if you'd fix it up, I'd be real obliged."

Caltrop started to speak, but thought better of it, and returned to his figuring.

"Two months and ten days," he said, after a moment. "That's ninety-three thirty-three. You've had five advances—four of twenty apiece, and one of three dollars, making eighty-three in all. I make it ten thirty-three coming to you. Call it ten thirty flat."

"Good enough!" assented Buff. "I'll take the cash, if you've got it handy. Those barkeeps always discount a check."

Caltrop counted out the requisite amount and handed it to Buff.

"Let me tell you," said the manager, while Buff was stuffing his wealth into his pocket, "this is the worst day's work you ever did in your life, Buff. Plowing, and you a puncher! I don't understand it. By Gawd, I don't! I think you must be crazy."

He closed on a sorrowful note, and wagged his head at Buff.

"Oh, I'm crazy," Buff admitted cheerfully; "crazy like a fox."

"Then go on and be crazy outside somewheres," Caltrop snapped, provoked. "I'm busy. I just expect I'll have to ride over to McFluke's and clear those nesters out myself!"

"Don't let me discourage you," said Buff kindly; "but I've sort of set my heart on having those nesters let alone."

Caltrop went off with a bang.

"I don't give a damn what you've set your heart on. Those nesters must go, and they're goin'!"

"Suit yourself," Buff told him with phlegm. "Only be sure your chaw ain't too big for your jaw."

"Are you threatening me?"

"I never point a gun at a man unless I'm willing to shoot him. I thank you for your kind attention. So long!"

Whereupon Buff nodded lightly to his late employer and departed to catch up the Buster horse.

"Why, blank-blank-blanket!" cried Caltrop, in conclusion. "I tell you, Rum, Buff's gone crazy!"

"Doesn't sound like he's crazy," said Rum Gordon.

"You mean to tell me a puncher — a rider—would admit he'd been *plowing,* if he was in his right mind? The man's crazy as a June bug. He must be. That's why I didn't argue with him much. I knew it was no use."

"There must be something back of it all," suggested the foreman.

"You think so, do you? You're coming on, Rum. Didn't I just tell you what was the matter with him?"

"I know you did; but I saw Buff, and said so long before he left. Of course, I didn't know then why he was quitting, but I know he was as sensible as you or I. No, he ain't crazy. He—"

"Don't you know better by this time than to argue with Sam?" cut in Mame Caltrop, entering unexpectedly from the kitchen. "My Samuel is always right!" She ruffled her brother's hair as she passed to perch on the arm of her husband's chair. "What seems to be the trouble? Who's crazy, and why?"

Caltrop informed her in detail. Mame listened and laughed.

"So you think he's crazy, do you?" said she. "Nothing like it! One of those nesters is a girl, and he's fallen in love with her."

"How do you know?" demanded her brother. "No girls in the outfit, so far as I heard. Who told you there was?"

"Rainbow. I thought I told you. Anyway, Buff's in love. Can't you see it? It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"Rats!" Caltrop cried in scorn. "You're a woman! What do you know? Rum, get your horse, and we'll run those nesters off ourselves!"

"Wait," urged Mame. "Go a little easy, Sam. Do you know the father of that nester outfit is blind?"

"Sure I know! What difference does that make?"

"You didn't tell me he was blind," said Rum. "Not that it makes any difference," he added quickly, with a glance at his brother-in-law.

"I came to tell you in the office not five minutes after Rainbow left, but both you and Sam had just gone off somewhere. You didn't get in till all hours, when I was asleep, and I never thought of it again till this minute. Anyway, I'm telling you now. Don't be too hard on those people."

Caltrop shook his stubborn head.

"I don't want 'em, and I ain't going to have 'em. Ready, Rum?"

"If you'll take my advice," Mame broke in, appealing to his head, when she saw that she had failed to touch his heart, "you'll wait till some of the boys come in, and take 'em along."

"Don't you guess Rum and I can curry a short horse like this by our lonesome?" inquired Caltrop.

"Sometimes these short horses have more legs than a centipede," rejoined Mame, "with a kick in every leg. You seem to forget that a man in love is likely to be mighty independent of consequences. Oh, all right, all right—have it your own way; only don't say I never warned you. My Lord, Sam!" Her voice rose shrilly. "You must think Buff Warren's a fool!"

"Didn't I tell you he was crazy? Come on, Rum!"

VIII

"BUSTER," opened up Buff, when the ranch was a mile over his horse's tail, "if you were as hopping mad as Caltrop, what would you do about those nesters? Would you sit still and fiddle your fingers till you could get the boys together, or would you sally right out and swing the job yourself?"

Buster, naturally, said nothing, so his master made reply.

"Knowing Caltrop for a hell-rushing party warranted to go off half cocked any time anywhere, it's my sneaking notion he'll take Rum Gordon and organize to turn the trick at once, if not sooner. Which being the case, it wouldn't be a bad idea for me to sort of watch the progress of events from the top of the next hill."

Anchoring Buster slightly below the crest of the reverse slope of the next hill, Buff lay down behind a wild currant bush and proceeded to put his idea into practice.

"Don't anybody pull his gun!" advised Buff.

Caltrop and Rum Gordon sat their horses in innocuous desuetude below a young growth of sumac fringing the top of a cut bank. Buff, observing that his prey was taking a course different from that calculated upon, had changed his place of ambush.

"You can't see me," went on Buff in his most genial tone; "but I can see you quite plain," he added thoughtfully.

Caltrop and his brother-in-law remained silent—the latter because it was his habit not to use words unnecessarily, the former because he was so stricken with surprise that his tongue failed him. Caltrop gulped and tugged at his collar.

"Look here, Buff, what do you think you're doing?" he demanded, when he could speak.

"Holding you up and making it stick," was the cheerful reply.

"Don't you know—" began Caltrop.

"I know that you're making a big mistake," interrupted Buff, "if you think you're going to run off those nesters today. You seem to have forgotten what I told you back there at the ranch."

Caltrop made no attempt to deny his destination.

"You can go plumb to hell!" he said, and started his horse.

Bang! The dry, whiplike crack of Buff's Winchester smacked the windless air. A bullet kicked up the dust under the nose of Caltrop's horse. The manager, losing the last vestige of his common sense, went after his gun. Rum Gordon, crowding in his horse, seized his brother-in-law's wrist, and held it fast.

"Don't be a fool!" he advised in a low voice. Then, in louder tones: "Don't shoot, Buff! No reason why this thing should end in the smoke!"

"Lemme go!" cried Caltrop, vainly jerking to free his wrist. "Do you think I'm going to let—"

"Do you think I'm going to let you get shot?" rejoined Rum. "Buff is holding every card in the pack. Have some sense! Let me try my hand at this."

The glare in Caltrop's eyes subsided.

"You stay here talking to him, and I'll slide around in back and get him," was his whispered counsel.

"Wait till I talk to him," insisted Rum. The foreman had always liked Buff, and, in spite of the latter's peculiar stand on the subject of nesters, he was not prepared to see him killed. "Wait now. I'll fix this up."

"All right," surrendered Caltrop.

Rum released the wrist he held, and turned toward Buff.

"You don't realize what you're doing, Buff. You can't buck the whole county."

"Who's going to stop me?" demanded the unseen Buff.

"We'll have to."

"I dare you to!" Thus the truculent cowboy, with a chuckle that set fresh fire to the tow of Caltrop's smoking temper.

"We'll take that dare!" shouted the ranch manager. "Tell me I've bitten off more'n I can chew! You'd better take a file to your own teeth. They'll need it before we're through with you!"

"Where," inquired Buff, "is your well known sense of humor?"

"Keep quiet, Sam!" enjoined Rum. Then, to Buff: "You ought to know what nesters mean on the range, Buff. If we let one come in, they'll all come. We can't have that."

"Sure, you can't," concurred Buff, anxious to do all he could to preserve friendly relations with his friend Rum. "Keep the rest out. This one family is all I want let alone."

Rum shook his head.

"Not even this one, Buff. We've got to make an example."

"Damn the example! Be reasonable! One family won't hurt the range, and you know it. All they want to do is to farm it. What's ten, or twenty, or even forty acres alongside of the hundreds of thousands there are on this range?"

"Nothing at all, looking at it that way," was the prompt reply; "but when you multiply those tens, twenties, and forties by hundreds, they mount up. Soon they put a crimp in the range. Then where is the cattle business?"

"Can't help it," persisted the stubborn Buff, his single-mindedness of purpose not shaken in the least. "Between—here, where you going? You stay right there with Rum, Sam!"

Caltrop checked his half turned horse.

"You're almighty suspicious, seems to me," he snarled. "How long do you expect us to sit here gassing with you?"

"Not another minute. You're going now, and you're going together. I ain't figuring to let Rum hold me here a talking while you ride around and plug me in the back—no, not to-day, old-timer. So long!"

"Say, look here! You can't—"

"I said 'So long,'" Buff cut him short. "And take my advice with you—leave the Fair family alone."

"The Gair family—is that right?" Caltrop inquired, evincing a lack of attention to detail that was at variance with his nature, as Buff knew it. "The Gairs—I'll try to remember."

"Fair is the name," Buff patiently corrected him. "F, A, I, R. Just bear it in mind, that's a good fellah. Once more, so long, good-by, farewell to thee! I don't want to set you afoot," he added pointedly.

Caltrop and his companion took the hint. When they were gone, Buff, after a careful reconnoissance had convinced him that they had no intention of turning back, returned to his horse. He tightened the cinch with a sober face.

He realized that he had taken an irrevocable step. Quite definitely he had placed himself beyond the pale, outside the ranks of the cowmen. Henceforth he would not ride with riders. The companionship of camp and trail, the warm and friendly atmosphere of the bunk house, were no longer intimate parts of his existence. His friends? Who in that country but nesters would be friends of such a man as himself?

Everything that went to make life the hitherto joyous thing he had found it, he had exchanged—for what? The one woman, or the pot of gold at the rainbow's end? He did not know.

"And that's that," he said aloud, and swung into the saddle.

Rainbow, brave with a new pair of silver inlaid spurs, her carved spur leathers embellished with glass rosettes an inch and a half in diameter, her horse, Windigo, looking through a split-ear bridle of carved leather with silver conchas, a silver buckle, rein chains of Mexican silver and a Kelly bit inlaid with silver, waved a morning greeting to Buff.

"Howdy?" said Buff. "Where's the quirt?"

"Quirt? What—oh, that! Shucks, Buff, I wouldn't rub it in that way. A bet's a bet. The bridle I told Joy to charge to you. The spurs I bought myself. I'm perfectly willing to make you 'most any old kind of bet you like, any time!"

"Not to-day," Buff declared hastily.

Rainbow laughed.

"It was a sure thing, wasn't it? How come you're riding Buster? I thought Bill kept him in cotton wool."

"He's mine now, Buster is. I ain't workin' for the Eighty-Eight any more."

Rainbow accepted this without comment.

"I'm going to the Eighty-Eight now. Didn't I see two Eighty-Eight gentlemen in this vicinity a while ago—under that cut bank yonder?"

"You may have," assented Buff.

"Looked like they turned around and went back the way they came."

"They may have changed their minds."

Rainbow nodded.

"Caltrop and Rum Gordon are given to that. Did you have to argue with them much?"

"Not much."

"Caltrop very unreasonable?"

"He acted up some."

"I guess Mame couldn't swing him, after all. She told me she didn't think she'd be able to when I talked to her yesterday. He's plumb set in his ways whenever nesters are concerned, and the more you oppose him the worse he is."

"Don't I know that well enough?" admitted Buff ruefully.

"I expect he's just about raving savage now?" hazarded Rainbow.

"Just about."

"Then it's no use my going over to the Eighty-Eight to-day. He'll be jumping sidewise all over the place. Where you bound — the Fairs? Then I'll ride with you."

IX

"SHUCKS, you oughtn't to have done that!" said Buff deprecatingly, eying the completely plowed field. "I was figuring to do it myself, only I was detained."

"Don't apologize," said Gilian, unhooking the doubletree from the plow. "I'm pretty well used to plowing, and there's really no reason why you should do all our work for us."

"I—er—I like farm work," declared Buff, and at the moment he really believed he did. "You going to harrow now?"

She nodded.

"That comes next, but—"

"Let me do it." Buff slipped from his horse, dropped the reins, and gently but firmly took the plow lines from Gilian's fingers. "You'd better go to the house and see Rainbow. She stopped to talk to your mother. I'll just hook on to the harrow and have the job done before you can wink."

Without further ado Gilian departed. She did not look back. If she had, she would not have realized what it was costing Buff not to limp. Each of his feet felt as if it were on fire.

"A pair of shoes for me, soon as I strike town!" said he, as he choused the mules down the field.

For three days Buff Warren hung about the Fair place. When the harrowing was finished, the mold was still too wet from a recent rain to put in the seed. Buff hung about doing odd jobs. He thought it as well to stay on a few days, in case Caltrop should persist in his attempt to drive out the Fairs; but apparently the rancher had experienced a change of heart. At least, he committed no overt act during those three days.

The fourth day dawned hot. It promised to be a roaster, and it kept its word.

Buff, whose feet were feeling considerably better, thanks to many applications of salve, decided to plow another couple of acres. He wished to preserve at least an appearance of industry in the sight of his lady.

He had not been working more than an hour when Gilian came out, bearing a jug. She waited for him under a cottonwood at the field's end. He halted his team in the shade, and she proffered the jug, beaded with drops of moisture.

"Buttermilk," said she. "I thought maybe you'd like some."

He drank gratefully. Buttermilk! He closed his eyes and was home again. The lilacs were in bloom, and his mother, in one of the blue and white print dresses she always wore, was moving among them. Far away a cowbell tinkled; but it was only the ringing of his spurs.

He put down the jug and wiped his mouth. Gilian regarded him curiously. She had flopped down cross-legged, and sat hugging her knees.

"Why have you adopted us?" she asked him point-blank.

Buff reddened, and hated himself for reddening.

"Have I adopted you?" he asked in his turn.

She waved her hand at the field.

"Looks like it. What about your regular work?"

"I haven't any regular work."

"I thought you rode for the Eighty-Eight."

"Quit."

"Because of us?" she probed, running a finger around the inside of her handkerchiefless open collar.

"I was about ready to quit. Us fellahs come and go. Never stay long in any one place."

"You didn't answer my question," she prodded, sticking to her point. "I'll bet you and the Eighty-Eight folks had words!"

"Nothing like that."

"You can't fib to me," she told him calmly. "I can tell by just looking at you whether you're telling the truth or not. You quit the Eighty-Eight on account of us, because they didn't like it when you wouldn't run us off. You oughtn't to have helped us. It's bound to hurt you. We nesters are bad luck to cowmen."

"Not to me," he said.

"Can you get another job?"

"Easy!" This with all the confidence in the world.

"Suppose the other ranchers heard about your helping us?" she asked shrewdly.

"Suppose they do!"

"Where's your job then?"

"What difference will that make?"

"You can't make me believe it won't make all the difference in the world. If you've got any sense, you'll get on that horse of yours and give us the go-by."

"What would you think of me if I did?"

The amber eyes dropped.

"I'd think you were doing just right."

"You know better! You'd think I was mighty low down—that's what you'd think. Your folks don't mind my hanging around, do they?"

"They don't, but—"

There was a troubled look in the amber eyes.

"Then, if they don't, there can't be any buts. *You* don't mind, do you?"

"If you'll take my advice," she told him steadily, "you'll go away and never come back here."

"Do you want me to go away?" Buff demanded.

"Yes," she said abruptly, without looking at him.

"Look at me!" he commanded gently. "Look at me and say that!"

She looked at him critically.

"Don't be so tragic. I'm telling you to go for your own good."

"Tell me why."

She shook her charming head.

"I can't tell you."

"Won't, you mean."

"Take it that way, if you like," she said with studied indifference.

Baffled, not a little upset, he stared at the girl. Before he could reorganize his forces for a counterattack, the Bob twin, wet to the waist, came pelting up the slope from the fringe of trees along the river and flung himself panting upon Buff, who only saved the jug of buttermilk from destruction by the briskest sort of action.

The twin's face, red with exertion, was working convulsively. At first he could not speak, but puffed and panted and crowed gaspingly.

"Here!" said the capable Gilian, seizing her brother by the shoulders and expertly tripping him into a sitting position. "Get your breath, and then talk."

Within thirty seconds the twin began a wheezing flow of language, absolutely incoherent, so far as Buff was concerned; but Gilian understood. Buff could see her cool expression alter to one of angry indignation as she listened.

She turned swiftly to Buff.

"He says that some man is driving away our bunch of cattle. He's heading up the river on the other side—a mile away, Bob says, but he isn't very good at distance, and it may be more. What—"

"Don't you fret," Buff advised kindly, his hands rapidly unharnessing the off mule. "I'll attend to this thing. There's no use telling anybody at the house about this. You and Bob better stay here till I come back."

"I expect so," said Gilian, her hands clasped together. "T-take c-c-care of yourself. Don't let him hurt you!"

"You bet I won't," promised Buff.

He flung himself astride the stripped mule and galloped off across the plowland toward the shed, in front of which his still saddled horse stood nibbling at the grass.

Pushing his horse, Buff marked the rustler's course from a hilltop, and rode in a semicircle to cut him off. In this maneuver he was so successful that when the rustler was within two hundred yards of the cottonwoods along Packsaddle Creek, Buff rode out from among the trees.

He recognized the man—Andy Tresawna, of Farewell, a gentleman who played cards not only wisely but too well. It was commonly reported of him that he could, when necessity called, make extra aces and kings sprout from practically any part of his clothing. Unofficial sources rated him a mine salter, and it was well known that he traded in horses; but cattle were a new interest of his, so far as Buff knew.

"'Lo, Andy!" Buff greeted him, and pulled up. "How's tricks?"

"Good enough," returned Tresawna.

His little green eyes, slightly close-set, were wary as a coyote's. He reined over his horse to ride past.

"Got a match?" asked Buff quickly.

Tresawna checked his horse at once, and reached up to his hat band for a match.

"Fat, strong-looking cattle!" was Buff's critical comment, as he took the match.

"Yeah," assented Tresawna, pushing back his hat and scratching his low-growing thatch of pale yellow hair. He wrinkled his predatory nose, took snuff, and sneezed. "Rappee?" said he, as if in an afterthought, and offered the mull to Buff.

"No, thanks," declined Buff, alert to catch the slightest hostile move on the part of the slippery Tresawna. "Mavericks, I see. Don't look like the stuff around here. Where you catch 'em?"

"Over yonder," Tresawna replied vaguely, flashing an oblique glance at the cattle grazing twenty yards away.

Buff Warren was asking more questions than were customary, but he asked them to the accompaniment of such a pleasant smile that Tresawna felt constrained to proceed softly.

"I didn't know you had any cattle, Andy. What's your mark?" Buff pressed on, in a tone most carefully casual.

Although the tone was casual, the import of the question was not, it being a known fact that only cattle are earmarked. Andy, dealing solely in horses, would not have an earmark; but the gambler was not stumped.

"My mark?" said he. "Staple fork in the left."

"How long have you been dealing in cows?" demanded Buff.

"Oh, some time, some time. You know where I can pick up a few more like these here? I wouldn't object to some more yearlings, either."

"I'll bet you wouldn't! This one yonder must have been somebody's milk cow, Andy. There's a blab on the calf, too."

"She's a range cow, Buff."

"Got another match? My pill is out."

Tresawna again reached upward to his hat band. The hand froze, and he stared at Buff in shocked surprise, for the latter's gun was trained on his belt buckle.

"Have you gone into the road agent business?" cried Tresawna.

"Aren't you pleased?" grinned Buff. "Competition is the life of trade. I'd feel better, Andrew, if you'd keep your right hand where it is. Now the left. That's it. Hold it! I'll just get your gun. Are you packing a hideout?"

"You got the only gun I've got—had, I mean," grumbled Tresawna.

"Which may or may not be true. You know how careless you are in little things like that; but for the sake of argument we'll take it I've got your one and only weapon. You'll notice mine is still pointing at the pit of your stomach, so don't let's have any vulgar publicity."

Tresawna suddenly smiled.

"I know!" he said brightly. "You want the cattle yourself!"

Buff shook his head.

"Wrong! The Fairs want them."

"I see!" Tresawna averred in a knowing tone. "They have a girl, haven't they?"

"We weren't talking about her," Buff said sharply.

"So we weren't," smiled Tresawna. "It was the cattle we were discussing. You'd like to take 'em back there with you—is that it?"

"You make my meaning plainer than I could myself."

"Hop to it, then, and don't linger on my account."

"We won't either of us linger. I want to see you well on your way before I do anything else."

"But the cattle might stray. I don't want to put you to any trouble, Buff."

"I thank you kindly, but it ain't any trouble. It's a pleasure. Let's go!"

Buff, as he rode behind Tresawna's horse, was not in the least deceived by the gambler's almost placid acceptance of the situation. Tresawna would undoubtedly try to kill him at the first good opportunity; and a good opportunity, in Tresawna's estimation, would be when Buff wasn't looking. If pushed, the man would fight fairly, but his preference was always for the furtive and devious.

(*To be continued in the March number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

The Other Cheek

A STORY OF THE PUGILATUS, OR PRIZE RING, OF IMPERIAL ROME

By John D. Swain

DOWN in the Suburra, some patrician ladies of Rome were giving a petting party at the Cestus Tavern, a resort of gladiators.

Wives and daughters of obese senators, of opulent contractors and taxgatherers, or of generals whose legions were crouched on some far frontier, having exhausted all the devices of luxury, turned to the Suburra. It was like the old Bowery of New York, the Barbary Coast of San Francisco, the London Whitechapel, the Paris Montmartre, rolled into one and cast in the harsh and primitive mold of the first century of the Christian era, or the ninth of the imperial city of Rome.

Skyscraping tenement houses, three or even four stories in height, and packed with idle women and dirty children; pawnshops; booths where cheap wine and boiled snails were sold; taverns patronized by gladiators, acrobats, soldiers, slaves, and seamen from every port of the Mediterranean—such was the Suburra. By day it was the haunt of race touts with tips on the charioteers, gymnasium hangers-on, masseurs, and animal trainers. At night there came into its oozy, ill lighted streets closed litters borne by powerful Nubians and attended by torchbearers and one or two armed slaves. From them descended veiled figures, any one of whom, as all Rome knew, might be the empress herself.

The ladies in the Cestus Tavern, redolent of strange perfumes which wild men had sweated across a thousand miles of stinking jungle and parched desert to fetch to the nearest trading port, sat upon hard, backless stools about a low, round, one-legged table. On the table were a great amphora of harsh red wine, a cheese of such powerful odor that it acted upon their jaded nostrils as a narcotic, hard-baked bread, and blood-red sausages oozing fat and garlic.

Their lips—which had more than once tasted single dishes whose contents had cost the price of a walled town—derived a certain perverse satisfaction from this coarse fare. Their nerves, reacting to the sounds and smells of the low inn, stirred in new thrills, which swept their sumptuous persons, steamed, pummiced, and perfumed in the baths which were at one and the same time libraries, theaters, gymnasiums, and clubs.

Their eyes half closed. Gentle sighs caused the jewels upon their breasts to rise and fall, and to twinkle in the light of the torches set against the walls. Their hands, soft and rosy, with henna-stained nails, crept out and strayed lingeringly over the brass-hard shoulder and arm muscles that the three gladiators proudly flexed.

Apart in a far corner of the low-ceiled room, two men sat watching the party with ill concealed scorn.

These two offered a striking contrast, while yet possessing certain basic qualities in common. The elder, whose close-cropped gray hair, strong but yellow teeth, clear eyes, and healthy skin left the tally of his years a matter of some doubt, bore on his face innumerable scars of conflict. His left ear would in our idiom be termed a cauliflower. His nose had been broken at least once; and as he was Latin by birth, it might now be termed a double Roman in design. Two of his front teeth were missing, and there were several ancient gashes on his cheek and jaw.

He wore a loose tunic. As he leaned upon the table, the tremendous development of his huge and hairy forearms balanced his mighty chest, which was nearly as deep as wide. Such was Lutorius, a

Roman citizen, the undefeated, though not unscathed, champion of the *pugilatus*. He had practically retired from active competition. He was now a *lanista,* or trainer, and was commonly reputed to be wealthy, for a gladiator.

His companion looked slender beside him, until one noted that the perfection of Greek symmetry masked the thews which, guided by a rare intelligence, had made him a champion of Greece at twenty-four. He was a freedman, only recently arrived in Rome, where he had entered the stable of a young patrician sporting man.

He had been matched against Lutorius, the bout being intended as a try-out, that Rome might get a line on the pride of Corinth. Barring accidents, nothing worse than a broken jaw could result from the exhibition.

The two were watching the petting party across the room, the elder with a manly scorn, the younger with an almost ascetic intolerance. They talked in Greek, because the newcomer spoke no other tongue, while Lutorius, in common with most Roman citizens, could manage a little Greek, which was the language of the court.

"Yonder folly points the downfall of Rome. In my youth, it was far different," said the old gladiator, voicing the eternal plaint of age. "To-day, we have women and dwarfs competing in the circus before the eyes of the rabble—aye, and knights, perfumed and powdered, contending against gladiators bribed to let them win!"

Onomastos, the young Corinthian, nodded abstractedly.

"So it comes about that our matrons no longer rear families of sturdy boys," Lutorius went on. "As our sons are devoured by the legions, their places are taken by a hotchpotch of immigrants. We are become the melting pot of nations. One jostles Goths, Gauls, Spaniards, Moors, Arabs, Egyptians, Syrians, Persians, Lydians, Thracians, Scythians, Cilicians, and the gods know what not. If you would seek a real Roman, you must visit the tombs of the Via Appia, or the trenches of distant battlefields. Soon Rome will cease to be the empress of the world, and will become its kept woman!"

The noble matrons at this moment rose languidly, each unclasping a jeweled bracelet and dropping it carelessly upon the table as she departed with undulating hips. Their companions of an hour rose, bowing humbly until the ladies had passed from the inn. Afterward, they made sneering comments that might, if overheard by their objects, have led to a number of crucifixions on the morrow.

Lutorius dismissed the matter from his mind.

"Onomastos, lad, I have a kindness for thee because of thy great father Epeus, he who was named after the founder of boxing a thousand years ago. He and I contended thrice. Our first two bouts were adjudged draws." He closed his eyes, and added reminiscently: "He was the first man ever broke my nose."

Onomastos sighed.

"My father was a heathen," he said.

The old man scowled at him.

"What? Wouldst utter impieties against thy own sire?"

"Not so, Lutorius. I loved him in life as I honor him in death; but he never knew the true faith. Daily I pray that when his soul comes before the judgment seat, God may forgive him his ignorance, and grant him everlasting life."

Lutorius grunted.

"Concern thyself not with his soul," he reproved the younger man. "We appeased it by three days of gladiatorial combat, together with much feasting, hard by his grave. No less than ten brave contenders died there, and their shades accompanied his across the dark Styx. I myself gladly yielded up two teeth against Amycus, one of those whose soul companioned his."

"Lutorius, you do not understand me. Such deeds will count rather against than for my honored father; for the law of the Carpenter of Galilee is one of peace, rather than strife, and of forgiveness to those who offend us. If smitten upon one cheek, we are bidden to turn the other."

The eyes of the old boxer grew round with surprise.

"By Castor! I have heard rumors of this new religion, fit only for Jews and slaves! How comes it, Onomastos, that you, a champion of the cestus, can hold such views?"

"It is but the other day that I saw the light, master; and then I vowed never again to raise my hand in anger against my fellow, nor to strike him rudely to make sport for others."

"But such a pernicious doctrine, were it ever to become at all common—which Mars forbid—would destroy this our world, my son. There would be no more warfare. The cunning and unscrupulous would hold the bold and strong in bondage. Why, you would even destroy all sport; for each contender, solicitous to please his fellow, would strive to let him win. 'Twould be: 'Strike thou first, my dear Lucius!' 'Nay, my dear Cassius, after thee!'—with the result that all the arts of combat would fall into decay. Who would train as we do now, punching bags of sand, bending iron bars of varied grades of resistance, putting heavy weights, running up steep hills, anointing our bodies with olive oil, denying ourselves cakes, watering our wine, abjuring women? You would put the finishing touch to what we have seen here to-night, and make ours a world of none but women and weaklings!"

"It is true, Lutorius, that great changes must come when Christ is king in this world, as He is of the world to come; but not such degeneracy as you picture, since all would be kindness and mercy. War will go, and soldiers, and floggings and torturings; but sport will not go. For the mutilations and deaths of the circus, the tormenting of captives and wild creatures, it will substitute new forms of contest in which agility, quick thinking, and skill will mark the winner."

Lutorius was too dazed and shocked to listen attentively.

"Your deity is not human," he said. "I like better the old gods. They are cruel sometimes, hasty, jealous, but at least one can understand them; and if one seeks to appease them, they are generous. Not one of them but would despise me, were I to permit any man to smite me, and then turn to him the other cheek! Aye, Onomastos—he who smites Lutorius chews no meat thereafter for many a long day!"

The young Greek smiled sadly.

"I am too young in the faith to show you its beauties, master. I would that thou couldst listen to him who has succeeded the holy Petrus, who—with Paul, the great orator, and on the selfsame day—was martyred here in your Rome."

Lutorius looked up shrewdly.

"This is, then a recent whim of thine? I will wager there is some woman in it! Who is she?"

The deep flush that the young Corinthian could not restrain told the old man that his shaft had struck home. His mighty fist smote the table.

"I knew it! Women run after every new thing, and each drags after her some poor, befuddled male. Name the wench, Onomastos!"

"It is not so," the other protested. "I saw the truth for myself. It was Magnonia, a slave girl of my employer Pompilius, who first took me to their secret meeting place; but she said not a word to me about her religion. That I learned from their priest."

"Huh! What looks she like?"

The eyes of Onomastos kindled.

"Her hair is like the sunset, all red and gold. Her eyes are deep pools in which stars are reflected. She is slender, yet supple, and with a waist that my two hands can girdle."

Lutorius guffawed.

"That's the way all women look—at first," he commented. "I know Pompilius well. Many a fat bag of sesterces has he won upon me. I've a notion to have him soundly flog the wench for debauching thee!"

The eyes of Onomastos narrowed, and his lips drew back in an ugly snarl. His hand slowly closed, while up and down his long, smooth arms ran a network of hard, flat muscles. He leaned across the table.

"If you do, Lutorius, I'll kill thee, big as thou art!"

"What ho? So we sing another tune? I thought thy new creed forbade giving a blow, and now we prate of killing!"

Onomastos paled, and sank down on his stool. He wiped the cold sweat from his brow. After a while, he spoke.

"'Tis true, I admit. I have sinned. Forgive me!"

Lutorius laughed boisterously.

"Fear not that I will harry thy sweetheart, lad! And now, away with this silly prattle of peace and good will. When old Lutorius slaps thy pretty, unmarked cheek in the circus to-morrow, thou wilt not, if thou art indeed the son of old Epeus, turn him the other cheek. Thou wilt give him plenty to do to guard his own!"

II

At that date the Colosseum was as yet only an architect's dream. The fashionable spectacles of Rome were enacted in the New Circus on the western bank of the Tiber—a structure of travertine stone, tufa, and concrete, with marble seats for ninety thousand spectators, and many and cunningly placed corridors through which they could make their exit in five minutes or less.

Every Roman citizen could draw rations of food from public storehouses, and was entitled to free admission to the circus. All he had to do was to pay a small rental for his dwelling, and buy clothes—that is, sandals and toga for himself, with sheepskins for winter, and cloth for his wife to fashion into garments for herself and the children.

It was a life of ease and pleasure, but the noble Romans degenerated under it!

The forenoon of the day on which Lutorius was to try out the young Corinthian boxer had passed. The customary parade about the arena had taken place. Division by division, those who were to contend had paused before the emperor's *podium* — a sort of balcony directly above the arena, on its shady side, and had chanted their immemorial:

"*Morituri te salutamus!*"

Ranks of gladiators in heavy armor, nearly naked *retiarii* with their nets and tridents, light-armed Numidian horsemen, wrestlers, acrobats, files of captives chained to slow-moving chariots—men from countries whose very names were unpronounceable, with complexions ranging from reddish yellow to jet black, and with all sorts of strange garments and weapons, caused a crackle of eager comment to run about the endless tiers of spectators. They made the slow circuit of the arena, and were swallowed up in the subterranean dens below the seats, until the herald should summon them forth.

The morning had been devoted to the bloody spectacles which have been many times described — combats between polar bears and lions; between men and pythons; between warriors, each using his own peculiar weapon, and fighting sometimes in pairs, again in groups.

In the afternoon, the gladiatorial bouts and chariot races would take place. It was upon these that most of the wagers were laid.

During the noon intermission certain novelties, mostly of an acrobatic nature, were introduced to amuse the common people, who always retained their seats and fetched their luncheons with them. The court, the patricians, and most of the well-to-do usually left the circus at this hour, returning after a leisurely noontide repast.

Since the contest between Lutorius and Onomastos was not considered to be a real fight, it had been scheduled for the intermission. Because of it, a considerable number of the *nobiles,* as well as most of the confirmed gamblers, remained to get a line on the stranger.

The editor of the games himself was present, and of course his herald, aloft on a small platform. The first tier, overhanging the coping, and reserved for pontiffs, senators, knights, ambassadors, and magistrates, was about one-third filled. The second tier, occupied by the well-to-do, held as many more. The third, where the manufacturers and tradesmen sat, was nearly deserted. The emperor's *podium* was empty; but most of the Vestal Virgins, who were keen sportswomen, held their seats in the box immediately to the left of the imperial balcony.

Lutorius and Onomastos awaited their turn in one of the underground cells, low and vaulted, which opened through an iron grille to the yellow sands of the arena. Some of these cells were subterranean pits with ingenious appliances for raising the great, uncouth wild beasts which were sent to Rome from provinces beyond the rim of the world. One—a capacious one—was a rude mortuary, into which were flung the bodies of men and animals alike, the losers in the public games. The chambers were damp and chilly, although outside the sun smote the shimmering sand so hotly that across one end of the great oval structure a purple awning had been drawn.

To Lutorius, the forthcoming bout offered difficulties he had never before been called upon to face.

In Rome, sport was nearly as sacred as religion—was, indeed, an integral part of it. There was plenty of crookedness, as there always has been and will be in professionalism; but cowardice was almost unknown. To show a yellow streak was to offend the emperor, and the Vestals, who were priestesses; to infuriate the populace, which was Rome itself; in short, to commit sacrilege. If a slave, the quitter might be grateful if merely sewed into a bearskin and tossed to a pack of wild dogs. A freedman could be branded and sold into slavery.

All of this Lutorius had told Onomastos, but to no effect. Only upon his last appeal, that he would be discrediting Lutorius himself by a failure to make it a real contest, did the young Greek reluctantly agree to go through a hollow pretense of fighting.

This by no means solved the problem. The old boxer knew that the eyes of the keenest judges of form and technique in all the world of sport would be fixed upon them. Young Pompilius would be there, with his friends, and so would the bookmakers, with their ivory tablets. The *lanistae* would read every move as if it were written in large script.

There was yet another complication. Lutorius knew the almost irresistible control of a thoroughly trained body over the mind. When an athlete had rounded into perfect form, he did involuntarily the things that his mind had laboriously acquired. Motion preceded conscious thought. It was Lutorius's task to knock Onomastos for a row of Corinthian columns, as it were, without seriously hurting him, and to make it appear that he had done so against real opposition.

Could he have counted upon Onomastos not to fight back, he could have managed it; but would not the young Greek fight back despite himself? Lutorius felt certain that, once in the old familiar posture, a feint would draw him out, and, before he realized it, he would be lashing out with the deadly *cesti*—the heavy bands of oxhide with which the fists of the Roman boxers were wrapped. So the old gladiator had to think of his own defense, despite the Greek's insistence that he would never again strike a fellow man!

The herald's messenger interrupted his musings; and together the two boxers stepped out into the scorching sunshine, barefooted, and wearing only cloth girdles and their *cesti*. Had they been engaged for a real contest, they would have worn "limb breakers"—either circular rings padded for the hand to grasp, or leather gauntlets covered with metal knobs.

As they saluted the editor of the games, and squared off, the superb condition of Onomastos was evident to all the judges of human flesh who were present. Ten months of training of the severest sort had been undergone before he left Corinth. This had embraced the usual gymnasium routine, a splendid system of baths, and a diet in charge of the anointer, consisting largely of meat, after the method of Pythagoras, who had done away with the old régime of fresh cheese, dried figs, and wheat.

Onomastos had slept till late in the morning, had eaten from two to three pounds of pork, goat flesh, or beef at a sitting, had taken a stiff walk to aid digestion, and had worked steadily all day, with intermissions. In his sparring bouts he had worn soft leather gloves, with pads for his ears.

As for Lutorius, he was always in condition, though now a trifle heavy about the waistline.

The classic pugilist stood with his left foot advanced, his weight on his right foot, and both arms held well out. The hand was kept half closed, except in the act of striking. Clinching was not allowed, as the rough *cesti* would have lacerated the flesh too cruelly. Tripping with the feet was prohibited, as forming part of the technique of wrestling, rather than boxing.

There were no regular rounds, although a pause was allowed in case both contenders were too fatigued to go on, yet unwilling to quit. In such event, each rested on one knee. Defeat was acknowledged by lifting one finger. Trainers stood near, and freely coached their men.

The methods of the boxers were vastly different from those of to-day, and for a very simple reason. A single blow often decided a contest, and not infrequently caused death. There could, therefore, be no such thing as taking a blow to get one in, or a rapid exchange at close quarters. Extreme caution was displayed, together with prodigious agility and much feinting, until an opening offered.

Men were trained to hold out their arms heavily weighted. Often one waited until the arms of the other dropped from fatigue, and then pummeled him out, sometimes striking with both hands at once. One champion was said to be able to hold his arms out for two whole days at a stretch. Frequently he left the arena without a blow having been struck, save his final winning punch. It was the ambition of all to leave the ring unscathed—an ambition wherein Lutorius had failed signally.

The old gladiator received a great welcome, as he had been a favorite in Rome for two generations. Onomastos, too, was cheered heartily, for his record was as well known as that of any "home run king" of our time is to the sporting American.

In such a contest as now began, there would be much more action, though of a less murderous quality, than in the regular ring fights. Lutorius was counted upon to put the newcomer through his paces. He was too canny to permit any of the trainers to draw too close, and warned them imperiously aside. He set himself squarely, advanced his arms, and his piercing eyes bored into the luminous ones of the son of his old opponent, Epeus.

Ere a minute had elapsed, Lutorius knew that Onomastos was quicker than he—quicker by some twenty years. He knew, also, that, even as he had anticipated, habit held the Corinthian in its clutch. When Lutorius, by an elaborate and crafty series of feints, tied the younger boxer into knots, and sent a ripple of laughter foaming along the marble bench, he read anger in the boy's eyes. A second later, leaving a pretended opening, he felt the stirring of the air as his opponent's *cestus* lashed out, just missing his jaw!

It would have loosened a few teeth, at the least, the old master thought, and smiled grimly to himself.

Shouts of admiration recognized the nimble leaps of the boxers, in and out or sidewise, the swift play of arms, the neat parrying or clever ducking.

The task of Lutorius was one of extreme delicacy. It was perhaps the hardest he had ever undertaken. It would not have been easy, even when performed upon an inert foe, and now, with Onomastos for the time forgetful of his new religion, the old gladiator must run the distinct risk of a counter that would bring his gray hairs to shame. To be knocked cold by a boy, in a practice bout, after holding the championship since before Onomastos was born!

There is, deep sheathed in the neck between the jugular and the carotid, a nerve known to every second-year medical student, who sometimes delights in playing pranks with it. It is the phrenic, which controls the diaphragm, and hence the respiration. Steady pressure upon it, or a swift blow, will produce instant though only temporary collapse; but one must know the exact spot to strike, and it is not too easy to find.

Lutorius knew it. Not in these terms, certainly. He merely knew that there was such a vital point in every neck. It was one of many things he had learned in thirty-five years of punishing gymnastics.

He had rarely availed himself of this particular bit of information, and then only when engaged in the *pancratium*—a combination of boxing and wrestling, the severest form of contest known, which always endured till death or defeat. He had used pressure, and not a blow, upon the phrenic nerve. It was this desperate chance he now prepared to take, in order to incapacitate Onomastos without injuring him.

On one point, at least, his mind was relieved — no one would suspect Onomastos of not trying. His leads were now far harder than Lutorius's, and it was evident to all that despite his slenderness, he carried sleep, and perhaps death, in the oxhide hammers that moved with the speed of vision.

So cunningly, so craftily, did Lutorius mislead the Greek, that Onomastos had no slightest suspicion that he was gradually being forced and inveigled around and into the sun. The onlooking trainers saw, and grinned at the familiar tactics of the old master. Most of the gamblers and sports saw it, too; but not until the full blaze of the sun smote him square in the face did young Onomastos know.

Before he could profit from his discovery, something else smote him, in the neck—something hard, and lightning quick. It was the extended thumb of Lutorius.

"Easy with him!" the victor warned the slaves who approached to drag off the limp body, while the circus rocked with shouts, catcalls, and whistles.

Down in the underground cell once more, Onomastos opened his eyes, blinked, swallowed hard, and sat up. Lutorius patted his shoulder.

"Thank you, my boy! Thank you for not disgracing old papa Lutorius! You deceived the best judges of Rome. They all thought you were really trying!"

Onomastos gulped. He turned red, and then white. Suddenly, his eyes were aswim with tears.

"God forgive me, I *was* trying!" he moaned. "I forgot all about *the other cheek* and everything! Why, Lutorius, I believe I tried to hurt you, to batter you down!"

"*Tchk, tchk!* Well, I declare! I never knew the danger I was in. It's lucky for me a chance blow sent you down."

Onomastos felt of his neck curiously. He passed one hand over his face, on which there was not so much as a scratch.

"What I cannot understand," he said at last, "is what really happened to me. I was trying to get out of the sun—and the next I knew, I was here on my back. Well, one thing is sure—I'll never again draw a *cestus* over my knuckles. When I feel those cursed gloves, I forget everything but what I learned in the gymnasiums!"

III

The early Christians did not live in the catacombs, tradition notwithstanding.

None save Vestals could be interred within the walls of Rome. Along the stately Via Appia, and other roads outside the city, rose a double line of sarcophagi—miniature temples, Egyptian pyramids, austere tombs, where the patricians and the wealthy bourgeoisie laid their dead. The poor burrowed underground, and there, in long, crooked galleries, tier upon tier, slept the plebeians, the slaves, the nameless ones, the martyrs.

As the tunnels became filled, each shelf bearing its sleeper, new caves were excavated, following no fixed plan, connecting older passageways, crisscrossing, or ending abruptly. Here and there several of the warrens met, forming a sort of room, or cell. It was easy to get lost in the network of subterranean alleys. Many a skeleton has been found in some forgotten winding.

It was natural that bandits, criminals of all sorts, and runaway slaves, should take refuge in some of the numerous catacombs without the city walls. Only the immemorial fear of the abode of the dead prevented a freer use of these uncharted and unlighted charnel houses. Men fled to them only when desperately harried. They died there, sometimes, and their pursuers, losing themselves in turn, more than once starved within a few yards of their quarry, but separated by thick ranks of the secretive dead.

To-day, guides take parties of tourists through a small fraction of four or five of the best-known catacombs; but there are miles upon miles into whose black and sinister streets no living foot has ventured for centuries.

It was inevitable that when persecution befell the early Christians, they should flee to the catacombs, as had other tormented fugitives. They learned to know these intricate mazes as no one else knew them. They had a hundred short cuts and exits. They turned one or two of the larger focal points to their ritualistic uses. Here they brought the mutilated bodies of those who, in the arena, defied the terrors of fire and cross and wild beasts for their faith.

But in no sense can they be said to have lived here, as a community, or for any extended period. No one could live for long in these damp, sunless, miasmatic burrowings into the pestilential breast of the Roman Campagna.

Lutorius, before parting with Onomastos after their brief but spirited clash in the New Circus, had promised to attend a service of the new sect, and to hear from the lips of its arch priest the tenets which had made Rome, hospitable to so many diverse creeds, inflexible to stamp out this simple faith founded upon love and service.

First, however, he had a delicate mission of his own to perform. As a follower of the oriental cult of Mithras, in common with most soldiers and gladiators, he gave devout thanks that Onomastos was still safe. Not yet did any one suspect that the Corinthian boxer had become a pacifist, unwilling to give and take in the rough sports of the arena; but the truth would be known all too soon, unless Lutorius could carry out the plan that his astute mind had devised. In furtherance of this, the very day after the exhibition, the old boxer paid a visit to the palace of Pompilius, the leading sportsman among the young patricians.

He was fortunate enough to find him at home, and disposed to receive Lutorius, upon whom, as has been said, he had won many a wager, and for whom he felt as warm a regard as a *nobilis* could evince for a man of the lower classes.

He greeted the veteran familiarly, though without rising, offered his hand, and ordered a slave to fetch a flagon of Setian wine and some fruit. He waved Lutorius to a couch near his own.

"And how fares the undefeated champion of three generations?" he asked. "I took note that our much heralded Corinthian did not joggle the wreath upon thy gray dome!"

"It is of that I would speak, Pompilius. Thou hast shown me many kindnesses. Thou wert ever the first to back me in my matches, and to share generously with me when I won."

"Which was invariably," commented Pompilius.

Lutorius bowed.

"I have heard that this young Onomastos has a contract with thee."

Pompilius made a wry face.

"That is so; and, if I am any judge of form, he's not likely to fatten my purse overmuch. What think you, since you tried him out?"

Lutorius threw out his hands and shrugged his massive shoulders.

"That a great mistake was made in permitting so young a champion to leave home. In earlier days, Greece produced the finest boxers of the world. The Ionians excelled the Dorians; Rhodes, Arcadia, Ægina, Elis, sent us masters who taught us all we lacked; but we have outstripped them these many years. We have nothing to learn from them now."

Pompilius nodded. These facts were perfectly well known to one who was himself a student of the game, and who had received many lessons from old Lutorius.

"But what shall we do with the newest recruit for our stable?" he asked.

"Onomastos has everything but experience, Pompilius. Speed, strength, courage—all are his now; but it will be some seasons ere he acquires ringcraft. The first second-rater he is matched against here in Rome will mutilate him so that his own mother would repudiate him; and that would probably destroy all his self-confidence, so that thereafter he would never win a fight."

Pompilius sighed.

"I was a fool to sign him up; but it seemed that the champion of Greece—at such a figure as I got him for—was a bargain. What shall I do? Will you take him in hand, Lutorius, and keep him under cover until such time as he learns at least to keep out of the blinding rays of the sun?"

"Pompilius, thy wishes are my commands; but it were far better that he should return to his native land for a season, there to continue his training. He has not yet reached a point where the finishing touches can be imparted; and I am too old and weary to enjoy teaching rudiments which he can get as well from another. Let me send him to a good man I know of in his own city of Corinth."

"But would he go? Will he not—as he can—hold me to my contract with him?"

Lutorius shook his head.

"Not so. He knows, since our little set-to of yesterday, that he is not yet ripe for the Roman circus. I can promise that he will waive his contract, and for the bare passage money home—a matter of perhaps two talents."

"That relieves me of a burden, Lutorius, and I take it most kindly; but, since you have faith in our young cockerel, will he not be snapped up by some of my rivals when at last he comes to his full stature as a boxer? Would I not do better to pay his wages until such time, rather than lose a future winner?"

"I will pledge my own word," Lutorius earnestly stated, "that he will never put his signet ring to contract with any save thyself."

Pompilius raised his glass of wine to the gladiator, nodded, and drank.

"Thy word suffices," he said briskly. "I thank thee, old friend. Now, how may I show my gratitude in better guise than by mere words?"

"I am, among my fellows, reckoned a man of property," Lutorius said. "I have lived abstemiously, and have put by most of my winnings. I would not be beholden to any; but, as a plain matter of business, I'd fain purchase from thee a slave, unless she is indeed a special favorite."

The eyebrows of the young patrician rose.

"And what may she be called?"

"Magnonia is her name."

Pompilius laughed boisterously.

"Why, thou old Silenus! Dost think so pretty a maiden as she will learn to love thy thickened ears and broken nose because they represent victories won when she was in swaddling clothes?"

"Not so, Pompilius; but I am unmarried, and lonely. I would, if we can bargain together, give her freedom, and adopt her as my daughter."

"*Humph!* Well, she is naught to me, and you can have her and welcome; but, first, my wife must be won over. Magnonia is one of her handmaidens."

Half an hour later, after a genial bickering in which the good-natured Pompilius sought to sell the slave girl for less than she was worth, while the sturdily independent Lutorius refused to consider his purchase as aught save a strictly business transaction, he departed as sole owner, body and soul, of his first slave, and at a price which had made a sad hole in his savings.

Pompilia, her mistress, had expressed indifference. It seemed that the girl's interest was so bound up in a new and silly sect from Palestine that repeated floggings had failed to make of her the servile handmaiden the haughty young matron demanded. But she agreed that for the present, and until her new master could make use of her, she was to remain with her.

Pompilia smiled ironically, Magnonia wept bitterly when told that she was now the chattel of a pagan pugilist, and Pompilius insisted upon regarding the affair as a huge jest.

"This marks thy finish, old friend!" were his parting words. "Remember, the *cestus* of Venus is mightier than that of the gladiator!"

A classic joke, hinting broadly that poor old Lutorius, having in his ripe years turned toward feminine pulchritude, would do well to avoid future appearances in the ring.

IV

It was now mid forenoon, and Lutorius bent his steps toward the Cestus Tavern, where he was to find Onomastos, and to proceed with him to one of the meetings of his sect.

The inn of the gladiators presented a sleepy appearance at this hour. Save for the young Greek and a tipsy muleteer, there was nobody in the room when he entered.

Together they passed through the Suburra, saluted constantly by the street loungers, to all of whom the old boxer was well known, and followed by half naked urchins, much as a champion fighter is followed in our own day when he appears in public.

They passed by the Temple of Minerva, crossed the Forum of Augustus, and followed the Via Lata—the famous Corso of medieval and modern Rome — until they passed beyond the limits of the city. Here, almost at once, they found themselves in a bleak and almost deserted countryside. Herds of goats browsed in the meadows along the river, while long-haired cattle moved toward Rome in stately droves. Wild-looking shepherds dressed in skins, with strips of leather wound about their feet and legs, a band of gypsy mountebanks lounging about a small fire of twigs and dried grass, and far down the highway a convoy of merchants from Gaul—these replaced the swarming life of the city streets.

Onomastos branched off across the rough bracken, following a faint path toward a clump of ilex half a mile away. He spoke but seldom. Despite his new vows, and his abjuration of boxing, he was young and hot-blooded enough to feel a little resentment over the outcome of yesterday's exhibition. Also, he was vastly astonished. There remained on his neck no mark, no soreness. He could not imagine what had caused him to collapse so suddenly, losing consciousness and becoming helpless as a child.

He strove against this irritation as unworthy of a Christian; but it persisted, none the less.

Just beyond the ilex trees, a rough-looking fellow hailed them. To him Onomastos showed a little copper fish, and murmured:

"Blood of the Lamb!"

Whereupon the man stood aside and parted a thick-growing bush, revealing an opening in the earth, which sloped down at a steep angle, and into which Lutorius followed his guide.

After a few yards the tunnel turned sharply, and became so dark that he was obliged to cling to the hand of Onomastos; but directly thereafter, a lighted torch thrust into an iron sconce cast a ruddy gleam upon the bare earthen walls and the rough pathway. To right, and to left, until Lutorius had no manner of idea as to whether they were moving toward the city or away from it, they plodded on.

Now the passage became higher, and cleaner-cut. On either hand, tier above tier, were stretched the coffins of the dead, most of them sealed in mortar, others crumbled away and exposing fragments of bone which belonged to men who had perhaps helped Romulus to lay the first rude courses of the Eternal City.

On many of the graves were engraved rude emblems. Votive amulets and broken cups were lying amid the remains of those whose families had long since become extinct. A bronze tablet was incised with a prayer to the god of some forgotten cult, whose very name was strange to Lutorius.

It was fully fifteen minutes before a murmur of voices, and the beacon of other lights, indicated that they were nearing the end of their journey.

The room in which Lutorius presently found himself was perhaps the very first Christian church of Rome. It was some ten yards square, high-vaulted, with a lantern hanging from above, and with crude portraits in distemper upon its walls. Among them was one of St. Peter, depicted as a thin man of less than middle stature, with a pale face ringed by woolly hair and curly beard, and with bloodshot eyes. He had no eyebrows, and his nose, though long, was rather flat.

Opposite to him was St. Paul, a short, thickset man with a bald forehead, and handsome, agreeable features. His long, thick hair and beard were streaked with white. About the heads of each had been drawn a gilt nimbus.

At one end of the room stood a wooden altar, dominated by a plain cross, with a goblet of wine, a loaf of unleavened bread, and two candles. The candlesticks were of gold, magnificently embossed, and they struck the sole note of splendor in a place which was otherwise severely bare, lacking even a chair.

An elderly man wearing an embroidered mantle stood before the altar, and kneeling about the room were some twoscore men and women. To Lutorius's amazement, these, while mostly poor folk of little account—slaves, laborers, shepherds, fishermen—included two or three legionaries, a magistrate, a wealthy jewel merchant, and the wife of a senator. These few were all well known to him by sight, and he could not be mistaken.

While he was pondering this unexpected discovery, the priest began to address the gathering. Throughout the sermon, or lecture, and the simple mass which began immediately thereafter, Lutorius was struck by the apparent similarity of their creed and his own—the worship of Mithras, the soldiers' god. For, strange as it may seem, Mithras was regarded as of virgin birth, having been created from a rock, and as having suffered voluntary martyrdom for a sinful world. Also, his followers met in dark and secret places, and partook of water and bread.

His reflections were interrupted, in the very midst of mass, by the agitated entry of the rough-appearing man who had guarded the entrance to their catacomb. He whispered hurriedly to Onomastos, and to others. It appeared that some traitor had betrayed their meeting place, and that even now a band of armed men was threading the labyrinth, to seize one of their number, a runaway slave.

Even as the watchman was talking, there came the sound of distant shouts, the faint clank of metal. A dozen men rose from their knees, Onomastos among them, and followed the sentinel. The old priest paid no attention to the interruption, but proceeded steadily with his ritual. The women and children, together with a few aged men, remained, though uneasily, upon their knees. Lutorius followed the others, keeping close to Onomastos.

It was a place of many shadows; but of the torches which brought these ancient graves to a hideous simulacrum of life, none were carried by the hunted. In profound darkness they advanced to meet the armed force which had invaded their gloomy sanctuary.

Only a handful of the Christians were armed. The soldiers bore their short swords. A shepherd held his stout crook grasped with both hands at its center, like a quarter staff. A fisherman clutched a short, ugly knife with a saw edge. Lutorius wished that he had with him one of his knobby *cesti,* a blow from which would crack an antagonist's skull like a rotten walnut.

“ Wait here,” whispered Onomastos.

He posted himself at one side of the opening of a cross tunnel, from which they could see the approaching lights, and could distinguish voices which bawled advice as the attackers hesitated at some forking of the way. His friends had scattered, and Lutorius surmised that they were guarding the numerous openings which led to the central chapel. He doubled a great gnarled fist, and waited in silence.

Suddenly the foe was upon them. Instantly, from a black crevice on their flank, two Christian legionaries leaped out, thrusting with short, deadly jabs of their swords, creating much confusion, and killing or disabling half a dozen assailants before they went down under overmastering odds.

A moment later, a bearded and helmeted head lunged into the opening of their tunnel. Lutorius, grunting with the force of his blow, caught the intruder's jaw with the full reach of his right, and cracked it like a coconut shell. Another man, who stumbled across the body, was arrested and straightened by an uppercut that started from below the old boxer's waist, and fell back with his entire face beaten flat.

Then it seemed as if the entrance was choked with screaming fiends, who came on faster than Lutorius could swing his fists. He was aware that across from him Onomastos had seized from its grave an immense bone, the thigh of some old Roman, and was using it as a club. The sound of dead bone on living, the oaths of blood-crazed men, the gasp of outraged lungs, the sickly smell of fresh blood mingling with the dank breath of the tomb—of all these things Lutorius took note subconsciously; but he did not, at the time, feel any pain as his knuckles were dislocated and his hands made raw and bleeding, so that the masseur and anointer would work over them for many a long day before he could don a *cestus* again.

It was just as he and Onomastos, despite their frenzied defense, were forced back and away from their posts by the sheer mass of the assailants, and while they bled from a score of cuts and thrusts delivered haphazard by men who saw them dimly in the obscurity, that a frightful series of yells indicated that some sort of diversion had been created in the enemy's rear.

A great kettle of pitch, kept over its ready-laid kindling for just such emergencies, had been brought to the boiling point; and from an upper gallery two Christians were now ladling it out upon the men who choked the tunnel below. The blazing hot mass trickled over heads and arms, found crevices and chinks in helmet and breastplate. Where the victims tore at their intolerable burns, chunks of living flesh came away in their hands.

In an instant, a wild stampede followed. Two minutes later, all who could use their legs had fled. From tunnel mouths crept the Christians, to bend over the wounded, friend and foe alike, and minister to them. Five were dead—two of their own number and three others. These were laid decently in the chapel, with faces covered. Later on they would swell the silent population of the old catacomb.

Onomastos, blood streaming from a cut across one cheek, stood among the victims whom he had laid low with the thigh bone that he still clenched in his hand. He was breathing heavily, and in his eyes gleamed a ferocious joy. Lutorius smiled, and touched his friend's arm—gently, because his own hands were swollen and tender.

"How now, my Christian? It seems you forgot to turn the other cheek!"

Onomastos started, dropped his strange weapon, and passed a bloody hand across his face.

"Lutorius, I learn fast. I am young in the faith. Magnonia—she heard Paul himself speak upon the Aventine; but it appears that I have not yet grasped the whole truth. For even St. Peter drew his sword to smite one of those who took our Lord, and he suffered no more than a rebuke. And Paul himself bade his followers, when they fight, to *strike out as one belaboring the air!*"

"So then, one uses his discretion, and either turns the other cheek, or breaks the jaw of the smiter?"

"I think it must be that we are to endure ignominy and abuse, when no principle other than selfish pride is involved; but that in defense of our sacred rites and our loved ones, we must fight the good fight. I shall seek further light on the matter."

"And I," said Lutorius, ruefully examining his swollen hands, "shall seek Rusco, the anointer, and see if aught can be done to these faithful servants of mine!"

V

A SMALL craft, rigged for a single bank of oars, slid down the Tiber on the swift current. The rowers lounged on their thwarts, while aloft on a stern decking the tall figure of the helmsman was outlined against the stars.

Up forward, two men conversed in tones so low that the slapping of the wavelets against the bilge, and the croaking of frogs on the near-by shore, were audible to them, though unnoticed.

Onomastos, at the request of Lutorius, had met him after nightfall on a quay, and had boarded this boat, which was laden with merchandise to be transferred to a waiting vessel at Ostia, the port of Rome.

"I see not why we could not have talked as well ashore," wondered the young man. "This voyage seems a piece of folly, since we must walk back to Rome, or hire a horse."

Lutorius smiled in the dark.

"Thou are not returning to Rome, son of my old and honored foeman Epeus, nor yet tarrying at Ostia. You are embarked upon a long voyage."

Onomastos started violently.

"How mean you, Lutorius? And who appointed you to send me hither and yon, or to manage my affairs?"

"Some level head was needed, my son! It must be plain to you that Rome is not the home for you."

"If that be thy tune, sing it to the water fowl that I hear feeding in the marshes!" declared Onomastos. "By Zeus," he added, forgetting himself, "I'm leaving you now, though it means a swim!"

He started to rise, but the old man thrust him back with an arm as thick as an oak limb.

"Sit still, and listen to me! Must I throttle you like an unlicked cub?"

"You may be able, by your old craft and cunning, to outpoint me in the *pugilatus*," snarled Onomastos; "but no living man ever thrashed me in a rough and tumble. I'll have no—"

"Hold thy peace!" interrupted Lutorius. "There is plenty of time to swim ashore; but it is unnecessary, for, after hearing my reasons, if you still remain unconvinced, I will have yon steersman guide us inshore, where you may land without wetting your sandals."

The other sank back against the bulwarks, though sulkily.

"What of your contract with Pompilius? You can be jailed for breaking that. If obdurate, you can be sold into slavery. You are a boxer by trade. That is all you know; but with strong muscles and an intelligent head—of which latter I'm not yet sure—you may, in some new place where you are unknown, obtain honest employ, and haply learn a new art. To play the flute, peradventure; but not in Rome. You come heralded as champion of Greece. In two weeks, you abjure the *cesti*, and would be Mithras knows what—a cobbler, perchance. Ask yourself, Onomastos—are you stubbornly set upon martyrdom in Rome for the glory of thy God, or the bright eyes of a woman?"

Onomastos coiled like a cobra, and his face went pallid in the starlight. Lutorius saw that in another instant the hot-headed youth would be beyond control.

"Well, then, hear my last word," he said; "but not from my lips!"

He clapped his hands sharply, the act surprising and arresting the Greek.

From a group in the waist of the boat rose a slender figure, and moved slowly toward them. The face was visible only as a gray patch. A long gray mantle fell to the feet. Yet, the instant he saw her move, Onomastos's eyes widened, his mouth breathed one word:

"*Magnonia!*"

The girl daintily picked her way amid the bales and cordage, and presently stood before them. Onomastos rose, his arms hungrily questing. She raised her face to his. Reverently, with a passion that was almost religious in its fervor, the young Corinthian bent and kissed her smooth, dusky cheek.

Lutorius turned aside with a sigh.

He had won; and yet, at the moment of victory, he felt old and alone. He touched the girl on her shoulder, and she turned wondering, humid eyes upon his old ones.

"Magnonia," he whispered, "remember thou art a Christian maiden. *Turn the other cheek!*"

HEROICS

Let's put heroics to the touch—
Oh, not unkindly, but in fun.
You say you love me, dear, so much
That you would ten times sooner die
Than live without me. Good! And I,
Hating of course to be outdone,
Reply:
"Buck up, old girl! I hope you'll marry
Some rich young chap and raise Old Harry!"

As for my wanting you to take
Another husband, that's a pose,
Just as your prayer for death's a fake—
Both brittle figurines of speech;
And yet as forms they fill a breach
Practical deeds can seldom close;
For each
Hides in its shell this heroic kernel—
Love aims to be self-effacing, eternal.

Richard Butler Glaenzer

A Heritage from the Sea

WHAT CAME DOWN TO TWO WOMEN OF EARLYPORT FROM THEIR ANCESTORS OF WHALING DAYS

By Edward Boltwood

MRS. DE FOREST marched briskly to the pillared entrance of the Earlyport Athenæum, drumming a quickstep on her sport skirt of white silk with a perky cane. She hurried from the August sunshine into the portico, seized the knob of the library door, and set her pleasant chin executively. In the summer colony at Earlyport, and in various philanthropic associations in New York, young Mrs. De Forest's pose was that of the executive matron, habitually short of time.

After the door had rattled behind her, Mrs. De Forest's chin wavered. The village library always subdued her, somehow. She had declared only yesterday, on the casino piazza, that five minutes in the Athenæum would take all the pepper out of Douglas Fairbanks himself.

The cavernous room seemed especially somber and silent that forenoon. Mrs. De Forest dragged her cane on the matting of the gloomy aisle, which led between dark bookstacks to the delivery counter. Two women behind the counter surveyed her impersonally. Their chairs were raised by a platform, giving them a sort of magisterial effect, and the visitor had a feeling of being arraigned in court.

" How do you do, Miss Swain? Good morning, Miss Danvers!"

" Good morning," said Alpha Swain, in her calm voice.

" Morning," gently echoed little Miss Danvers.

" I hope you and your cousin have discussed my offer," said Mrs. De Forest, addressing Alpha, although Caroline Danvers was by far the older. " I've got to know your decision. I'm leaving on the afternoon train. Our board meets next week in New York to fill the two places."

Alpha twirled a penholder in her strong fingers. She was a handsome woman of thirty, tall and well formed, with black hair and a dusky skin.

" Caroline and I are ever so much obliged to you, Mrs. De Forest; but we didn't need to discuss your offer. We can't accept it. We can't go away. Some of our folks have run the Athenæum from the year it was built, back in the whaling days. This old library is kind of in our blood, I guess. We've both taken care of it ever since we were girls, and we've just got to stay."

" I believe you're making a great mistake; but what's the use?" Mrs. De Forest shrugged her trim shoulders. " Well, I shall see you next summer, Miss Swain. Good-by, Miss Danvers."

" Yes, ever so much obliged," murmured Caroline.

Alpha dipped the pen in an inkwell and resumed her task of copying cards for a new catalogue, which was not in the least degree needed. The card catalogue instituted by Caroline's grandmother was still perfectly adequate. Many of the cards bore Mrs. Danvers's copperplate script; many had been written by Alpha's mother. Her loving hands caressed the cards as she copied them slowly.

Caroline took a dust cloth from a cupboard and went to the museum alcove, near the desk. Here were arranged relics of Earlyport's bygone prosperity, when the whaling fleet of the New England town almost rivaled Nantucket's or New Bedford's. A rack of harpoons and lances hung against the wall. Affixed to the shaft of one of the lances was a rude silver plate:

> Presented to Bull Danvers, boat steerer, by Captain Nehemiah Swain, 1847.

Shelves were covered with outlandish curios from islands of the Pacific. Behind the glass front of a locked cabinet were carvings of Japanese ivory, strange gold coins, and pieces of oriental porcelain.

A timid frown of disgust wrinkled Caroline's thin, gray face. In her meek way, she hated the museum alcove. Dusting the rack of irons, she groaned faintly. Alpha looked up with an understanding smile.

"I told Dr. Randall again this morning, Caroline, that those things never did belong here. I told him that the trustees ought to clear out the whole alcove. My gracious! A library is meant to make people think about books, and not about deep-sea voyages!"

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said that I had no right to talk, because I was named after a whale ship myself, and that the harpooners of Earlyport really built the Athenæum, after all."

"Oh, no!" sighed Caroline. "It wasn't the Earlyport men who started the Athenæum. It was the women. What did such men care about libraries?" She blinked through her spectacles at the inscription on the whaling lance. "I guess you and I know about those old sailors, Alpha," said she. "Your grandpa and mine, and those dreadful doings at Samoa! Wild rovers—that's what the Earlyport whalemen were."

"They were not librarians, dear, at any rate," smiled Alpha, bending over the desk.

Caroline gazed at Alpha's bowed head, and suddenly her heart leaped in an ecstasy of love so passionate that she pressed her fluttering bosom with her slender hand. She remembered, days afterward, that she had never felt so happy as at that moment. She remembered always that picture of Alpha, bending over the catalogue cards, like a nun over a breviary, shielded from the world, as if behind convent walls, by the solemn ramparts of the books.

Then the door flew open, and a tanned, burly man swung down the aisle, whipping the bookstacks with the leathern peak of his blue cap.

"Why, Alpha Swain!" he called. "How is it with you, after these twenty years? Why, Alpha!"

II

From the library steps, Mrs. De Forest hailed Dr. Randall across the slumberous village street. He leaned obediently on the fence there, and she joined him.

"They turned me down," she announced.

"Of course!" he chuckled.

"But, doctor, how wrong! The jobs at our mission house would exactly suit those women. They'd be a lot better paid. They'd do interesting things among interesting people. They'd begin to live, instead of vegetating. It's wrong!"

"My dear madam, you are speaking to one who has vegetated in Earlyport for more than half a century."

With a laugh, Mrs. De Forest brandished her cane at the pillared portico.

"Alpha told me just now that the library was in their blood; but isn't anything else in their blood—enterprise, progress?"

"Let me give you a tip," said Dr. Randall, resting his elbow comfortably on the fence. "I know the Earlyport blood. It's a heritage from the ancient days when our men went in for whaling and our women went in for book learning. Enterprise? The old-time Yankee whalers were the most enterprising adventurers in the world. Hard men, often brutal. Why, for instance, we've got a whale spear in the museum that one whaler gave another, as a delicate souvenir, for saving his life by having killed a murderous Samoan with it in a fight started, I've heard, by a native girl. But our women balanced the scale. Our women sought education and refinement as keenly as our men sought whales and—other things. A hundred years ago, you might not have found more advanced culture in America than among the women of the rich New England whaling towns, although most of the men had none. That's the double heritage in our Earlyport blood. Tickets for my next lecture may be bought at the drug store."

"Well, Alpha and Caroline inherit through only the petticoat side, then," observed Mrs. De Forest.

"Maybe," said the doctor. "For that matter, deep-sea sailors are never in sight, afloat or ashore, at Earlyport nowadays. Our present degenerate fleet devotes itself to rum running and pleasure boating, and we harpoon nothing except the amiable summer visitor."

"But I still mean to harpoon your librarians, Dr. Randall. I suppose I couldn't harpoon one cousin without the other?"

"Decidedly not, although their cousinhood is only of an indeterminate variety—fifth or sixth, perhaps. Neither has any closer kin, and they keep house together. Poor little Caroline would doubtless die of desolation, if—hello, hello!"

Randall grinned as he watched a blue-capped man ascending the steps of the Athenæum.

"Who is that, and what are you grinning about?" demanded Mrs. De Forest.

"That is Zimri Nickerson," the doctor told her. "Zimri came back yesterday. Hasn't been here since he was a schoolboy. I am grinning because I just assured you that deep-sea sailors are never in sight at Earlyport nowadays. Well, Zimri is a solitary exception!"

III

Caroline Danvers went home from the Athenæum that day in a vague mist of fear. She knew what it meant to be afraid. She had known the dread of solitude, and of ill health, and of poverty—definite, reasonable fears, commonly faced by women in her circumstances; but the fear which came to her that day was the more cruel because it was vague and indefinite. She could not reason about it, could not face it. Her fear of Zimri Nickerson was like a cold mist, impalpable and bewildering.

Day by day thereafter, it was through this fog that she saw Zimri at the library, where he volunteered to set the museum to rights.

"Let's make all shipshape," he explained.

He even produced a stone and jocosely sharpened the whaling irons. Through the fog, Caroline descried him in the prim parlor of the Swain house, where she lived with Alpha. To Alpha he was constantly talking, telling her of distant seas and the marvelous tropics.

He had a master's certificate at last, he told them, and in October his owners would give him command of the Monticello, in place of Captain Carr. He had made two voyages to China as first officer of the Monticello. She was a fine vessel, and Captain Carr was a fine man, and Mrs. Carr was a fine woman. There were fine quarters for the captain's wife aboard the ship.

Meanwhile, it appeared, Zimri was killing time in Earlyport. The Earlyport men were pretty slow company—excepting Dan Shattuck, perhaps. Did Alpha remember what a lively kid Dan was at school?

Caroline would rather have heard about even the disreputable Dan Shattuck than about the voyages of the Monticello; but Alpha asked for further details of the beautiful coast line from Diamond Head to Honolulu.

"Why, I'll show you my photo album," said Nickerson. "Mrs. Carr and I took some dandy pictures, that cruise."

So he brought the album and sat on the parlor sofa beside Alpha, turning over the leaves, while Caroline, across the room, shivered in the cold fog of her fear.

"We have books in the Athenæum about those places, Alpha," she said, after Nickerson had gone.

A mysterious light, new to Caroline, burned in Alpha's eyes.

"Oh, books!" she breathed. "Books!"

"I hope," ventured Caroline timidly, "that we can finish the new catalogue by Christmas."

Thus against Zimri Nickerson did Caroline begin to marshal her feeble forces, laboriously devising wistful little schemes to remind Alpha of their winter's work. Was it time to plan the annual report? She proposed that they should copy the catalogue cards at home in the evening. A convention of librarians was to be held in Boston soon. Could not Alpha manage to attend it?

"It's my guess, Miss Caroline," suggested Zimri, "that you'd suit a libr'y convention better'n Alpha would."

The three were on a bench in the side yard of the Swain house. It was a warm Sunday afternoon, and Nickerson's shirt sleeves were rolled up over his big forearms. He had been clearing away the weedy rubbish which had long concealed the fallen and forgotten figurehead of a ship. The wooden image, now propped upright in the yard, crudely represented a woman with uncovered breast and windswept hair.

"I'll bet she's rounded both capes a plenty, that old girl," said Nickerson. "I'll bet she's off one of your grandpa's vessels, Alpha—maybe the one you were named for."

"Poor lady!" laughed Alpha. "Smothered under the weeds until you—until we set her free!"

"Free?" he questioned. "I'll bet that girl won't ever be properly free without deep-sea spray on her cheeks."

"Poor lady!" repeated Alpha; and her shoulder twitched oddly against Caroline's.

Mumbling an excuse, Caroline went indoors. She felt, in reality, a trifle faint. Her tender heart was wrung by a bleak sense of helplessness, like a clamp of ice. From the parlor window she could see Alpha and Zimri beside the figurehead. Alpha was smiling and touching the tattooed dragon on Nickerson's arm with the tip of her finger.

Caroline, forlorn and panic-stricken, leaned against the mantel, and her hand jostled an ancient daguerreotype. It was a portrait of her grandfather — Thomas Danvers, the boat steerer. She looked at the square, bony, indomitable face and underhung jaw. Obviously there had been reason for Bull Danvers's nickname.

Caroline had never seen him. His pictured face gave her no comfort. She was forlornly conscious that he must have despised all weaklings who took trouble without a fight, lying down.

At their supper table, Alpha spoke hardly a word; but after they had washed the dishes and lighted the parlor lamp, she abruptly told Caroline that she had decided to go to the librarians' convention.

"I've always wanted to," she added. "I'll bring back some new ideas for the winter cataloguing, Caroline. Why, what's the matter?"

Caroline was wiping a fine moisture from her spectacles.

"Oh, I'm just glad!" she said. "I'm glad you're not forgetting the Athenæum, Alpha. Sometimes lately I've thought—kind of thought—"

Her meek voice trailed off to silence. She became aware again of her grandfather, Bull Danvers, on the mantel. Well, he need not yet be ashamed of her. She was still unbeaten!

IV

Alpha went on an afternoon train to Boston; and early in the evening of the next day, Caroline received the letter. She read it at the post office on Pacific Square.

Dear Caroline:

I am not coming back. Zimri Nickerson and I shall be married here to-morrow, and sail for Panama. You will soon forgive me for making the change in this way, without the distress of a spun-out good-by. I want you to stay in the house forever, and you will find all about it in a note for Dr. Randall under my pincushion. Remember that I am very happy and shall love you always. This other love is in my ocean blood, I guess.

The October moon seemed to mock Caroline with its bright serenity when she left the office. She tried to nod bravely to people on the sidewalk. She must not let them suspect that anything had happened.

The minister's wife chaffed her about meeting a beau. She replied somehow, and pushed back a lock of gray hair with her tremulous hand. Her knees shook, too. At the corner of the square, she had to stop and pretend to be fastening her wrist bag.

Dan Shattuck strolled observantly by, in company with the mate of his rum-running barkentine.

"Has that old skirt got a jag?" snickered Dan. "Maybe we can sell her a case before we pull out!"

Caroline faltered around the corner into Sperm Lane. She was afraid of breaking down. Her knees shook dreadfully; but where could she go? Not to the Swain house—not yet to the Swain house, with the ghost of Alpha on its threshold.

She gazed helplessly toward the foot of the descending lane, and there she saw the quiet ocean, gleaming to the horizon like a vast sheet of hammered silver. Its tranquillity, like the moon's above, seemed to deride her. Where could she, also, find peace to-night?

Suddenly her heart quivered as a tautened hawser quivers astern of a tug. She half closed her eyes and stumbled up the lane. She knew what was pulling at her heart—knew at last where lay her refuge.

The mail-time loiterers had disappeared, and there was nobody to notice Caroline as she crossed the square and fluttered along the deserted street like a wounded bird seeking cover. The serene white pillars of the library gave her a tranquil welcome. A timid smile of gratitude nestled on Caroline's wan face. Here was her place of peace, her heritage. She groped in her wrist bag for the key, and touched the knob; but she found that the broad door was already unlocked.

Caroline drew back. She stared blankly at the disused building next to the Athenæum, and at the vacant houses across the silent street. Then she pushed open the door an inch or two.

A chair scraped on the floor at the other end of the dark room. Somebody was in the library.

Who? Who but Alpha? The instant conviction that Alpha had returned dazzled Caroline like a burst of flame. She noiselessly opened and closed the door. All in a dazzling moment, she felt sure that Alpha had come home again, perhaps contritely, perhaps—

"Alpha, my dear, my dear!" implored

Caroline, gliding through the dim passage of the central aisle.

Near the window of the museum alcove, Zimri Nickerson stood revealed to her by a ray of moonlight. Stock still, he confronted her, with his head low and his elbows bent.

V

"WHO'S behind you?" he growled. "Speak soft, or I'll—you alone?"

Caroline could not speak at all, except for a frightened sob.

"Come here to me, then," ordered Zimri. "Sit down. Well, I'll be damned! You're alone, hey?"

Rubbing his chin, he scowled at the frail, submissive figure in the chair, then at the dark shadows beyond the alcove.

After nearly a minute, the scowl vanished. Nickerson slapped his leg with the relieved air of one who has solved a problem, and his cuff dragged on the neck of a bottle in his coat pocket. Having disentangled it, he jerked the flimsy cloth cover from an empty shelf.

"You know too much for your own good, Caroline, old girl," said he thickly. "Boston train, ten fourteen. Just time enough!"

She dropped sidewise in the chair, so that her shoulder pressed against the rack on the wall. Zimri fumbled for his watch. As he drew it out, a number of gold coins fell from his pocket to the floor. He crouched to recover them, cursing sullenly when his head struck the swinging door of the museum cabinet.

"A thief!" gasped Caroline.

Nickerson began to rip the cloth into narrow bandages.

"Shut your noise!" he warned her. "You're going to be made fast to that chair for a nice night's sleep, with a nice gag in your jaw. One yap out o' you, and, by Judas, you're better dead! Un'er—understand that?"

"A ship captain, and a drunken thief!" she whispered.

"Cap'n nothing!" denied Zimri. "Don't believe all you hear, poor fool!"

"You lying scoundrel!" said Caroline. Her own voice startled her; she felt strangely uncertain that it was herself who had spoken, and uncertain even that it was Caroline Danvers who now stood up and leaned on the wall rack. A painted idol, in the moonlight across the alcove, grimaced at her with its horrible scarlet mouth and a Fijian war mask leered hideously. If she was Caroline Danvers, why was she not afraid, pitted against a brute in this uncanny place?

Her right hand, reaching backward for support, clasped a smoothly rounded bar of hard wood.

"A low-down whelp marry my Alpha!" said she, and gripped the wood so tight that it tingled in her hand, like a charged wire.

"What's that?" he grunted. "Alpha Swain? Why, I'll tell you about her! Tomorrow morning me and Alpha'll be safe aboard ship together, headed south. You needn't worry about Alpha. Marriage won't be our style!"

Caroline's left hand flew backward as a piece of iron flies to a gigantic magnet. She fingered a small plate, sunk in the wooden shaft.

"No, not our style," laughed Nickerson evilly. "I guess Alpha won't turn out the sort men have got to marry. Easy picking, Alpha'll be!"

Fastened to the shaft by her left hand, Caroline whirled half around, and snapped her right hand on the lance again. She was like a swift machine, moving without volition, without sound. The tingle of the wood was now a dynamic vibration that seemed to weld her to the shaft. Her body seemed to be but a metallic extension of the old whaling spear.

Nickerson looked up from a knot he was tying in the cloth. A sharp twist of amazement contorted his face grotesquely.

"Put that down!" he blurted.

Those were the last words he ever spoke to Caroline Danvers. Of him, her last remembrance was a horrible, scarlet mouth that merged with the mouth of a painted idol, prostrate on the floor beside him, and equally motionless; but of what immediately followed, she remembered nothing.

When her senses returned, that night, Caroline found herself alone in the parlor of the Swain house. She never knew how she had made her way there. All she knew was that when the mantel clock rang eleven, she was staring at it, still dressed for the street, with her wrist bag on her arm.

The lamp was unlighted, but she could see the daguerreotype next the clock. Suddenly she felt benumbed and very cold. A panic of horror seized her. She sank on her knees before the portrait.

"His work!" she moaned. "Bull Danvers's work!"

VI

In January, Mrs. De Forest journeyed to Earlyport to push the progress of a new casino. As she bustled from the Pullman, she espied Dr. Randall, waiting on the station platform.

"To meet me?" she queried.

"Alas, no!" admitted Randall. "To meet, on the contrary, an ugly box of dull books; but the express agent forbids. May I escort you uptown?"

"By all means. Books? Such a literary physician!"

"Well, I am not solely a physician. I am also president of a public library. And we have to fill an extra alcove, you see, now that the museum is given up."

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. De Forest. "I read something about it in the *Guardian*. What happened?"

"Whoever knows, won't tell," replied the doctor. "Our janitor, soon after daybreak, discovered that thieves had picked the lock of the library door and raided the museum. The crooks must have enjoyed a drunken fight there. A broken gin bottle was on the gory scene, and a trail of dried blood ran to the wharf from which Dan Shattuck's barkentine had put out during the night. The bold Dan'l and his gang and his rakish, black craft haven't been heard of since. Neither has Zimri Nickerson. Q. E. D."

"And that's the whole of it?" asked Mrs. De Forest.

"That," declared Dr. Randall, "is the whole of it."

They rounded a corner and perceived two women approaching them on the brick sidewalk.

"Here are the love birds you planned to separate," Randall observed, under his breath. "Let me advise you that they are even more happily in love with each other than ever before."

"Really? What makes you think so?"

"I don't merely think so—I know it," emphasized the doctor.

"But the plan is off," smiled Mrs. De Forest. "How do you do, Miss Swain? Good morning, Miss Danvers!"

"Good morning," said Alpha Swain, in her calm voice.

"Morning," gently echoed little Miss Danvers.

THE MOUNTAIN MOON

On the hyacinth marge of twilight,
  In this most magical weather,
The new moon over the mountains
  Hangs like a golden feather.

Over the cloven summit,
  While the delicate dusk grows denser,
It deepens in radiant amber
  Till it glows like a burnished censer;

Just as we saw it, belovèd,
  In the dear dream days departed,
Shedding its shining aura
  On two that were rapture-hearted.

New moon over the mountains—
  Over the mountains yonder—
Bear to my sweet this message,
  Wherever she may wander—

Tell her nor time nor distance
  Can alter the words once spoken;
That faith is a light unfading,
  And troth is a pledge unbroken!

Sennett Stephens

The Token

THE STORY OF A STRANGE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The House of Peril," etc.

THE English police are investigating what seems to be an extensive conspiracy engineered by foreigners in England, for purposes which are more or less of a mystery. The Hon. Peggy Mainwaring—daughter of Lord Copmanthorpe, a cabinet minister—and her maid, Monica Jackson, have become involved in the affair through happening to pick up a curiously mutilated coin—a half crown punched with dagger-shaped marks forming the Roman numeral "IV." The losers of this coin, or token, are apparently determined to recover it, for Monica is kidnaped from Lord Copmanthorpe's residence on Curzon Street, in London, and taken to a secluded house near Dorking, in Surrey. The police surround this place, and liberate Monica, though the house is fired by a bomb and its inmates escape through a tunnel, wounding two of the policemen as they flee.

The police officers playing leading parts in the investigation are Detective Inspector Furneaux, of Scotland Yard, and Inspector MacDermott and Sergeant Linton, of the Surrey County Constabulary. Sergeant Linton has entered the police after holding a commission in the army during the war. He is evidently much interested in Miss Mainwaring, of whose social status he is unaware, knowing her only as a companion of Monica Jackson, and supposing her to be a fellow servant of some sort.

VIII

AT half past eight o'clock on the following morning the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring was in the breakfast room of the house on Curzon Street, when the front doorbell rang. Believing that there might be additional tidings as to Monica's welfare, she hurried to open the door of the breakfast room, and was in time to hear a high-pitched and rather squeaky voice ask the second footman to produce Mr. Hobbs as quickly as possible.

"In-*deed!*" was the sarcastic reply. "An' who might *you* be, may I ask?"

"A very proper question, Jeames, though absurdly phrased," said the voice. "You really ought to have inquired my name and business, while such a little word as 'sir' would have supplied a polite addition. If the butler is still in his room, let me see you skip upstairs two steps at a time, and tell him that Detective Inspector Furneaux, of the Criminal Investigation Department, wants him at once. Perhaps he sleeps in the basement, but, whether high or low, send him here on the jump."

Meanwhile, the second footman had caught sight of a closed car, with a driver in police uniform, waiting at the curb, so he changed his note.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "If you come with me, I'll take you to Mr. Hobbs's sitting room."

At this point the Hon. Peggy appeared on the landing.

"Bring Mr. Furneaux here," she said. "Mr. Hobbs can join us when he is ready."

Like every other human being who met the famous detective for the first time, she was surprised, almost dismayed, when Furneaux confronted her. He did not measure up in any respect with her preconceived notions of Scotland Yard and its occupants. The detectives who had visited the house after the attack on Foster and the abduction of Monica were quite obviously policemen in plain clothes, but this bright-eyed, natty little man, wearing a well-fitting gray tweed suit and carrying a straw hat, answered exactly to Superintendent MacDermott's description of him, and might have been either a fashionable jockey or a leading comedian.

She thought that the valiant men who pursued and caught criminals must carry

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with them the implements of their dangerous trade, yet she was sure Mr. Furneaux's pockets could not possibly harbor pistols, handcuffs, or truncheons. He did not even carry a stick, and the smooth outlines of his waistcoat did not suggest the presence of a concealed match box, much less of a deadly weapon.

"Did I understand you correctly?" she began, motioning her visitor to a chair. "Are you Detective Inspector Furneaux?"

"Yes," he said. "And you?"

"I am Miss Mainwaring."

"The girl who accompanied Monica Jackson to Box Hill yesterday?"

"Well, yes—you can put it that way, if you like."

"Suppose we put it another way, Miss Mainwaring. What is your exact position in this household?"

"I am Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter."

Furneaux's face seemed to be covered with parchment-colored skin, which creased now with merriment, recalling to the girl's mind the cheerful grin of some member of the Japanese Legation whom she had met socially.

"Ah!" he cackled. "They don't know that at Dorking, eh?"

"I gave them my name and address," said Peggy, trying to hide a blush behind a teacup. "By the way, have you breakfasted, Mr. Furneaux?"

"I have been doubtful, ever since I sniffed your bacon and eggs," he admitted.

Mr. Hobbs entered at the moment, and showed his butlerlike qualities by receiving with undisturbed gravity an unexpected order to procure more tea and the materials for a second breakfast.

"I take it you need not attend to these trivial matters in person, Mr. Hobbs," said the detective. "Each minute is valuable this morning, and I want to hear Miss Mainwaring's story and your own as to yesterday's events, while I eat."

"In one moment, sir," said Hobbs, hurrying out again.

"Do you wish Mr. Hobbs to know all about your personal adventures?" inquired Furneaux, whereat Miss Peggy lifted her eyebrows.

"Why not?" she said.

"It is not for a mere man, a shrimp of a fellow like me, for instance, to enter into the complexities of a woman's mind, but I am under the impression that you were masquerading a little yesterday afternoon, Miss Mainwaring. If so, Mr. Hobbs, who is already sufficiently obtuse, may be left in that blissful state."

"But he knows everything!"

"Splendid! You, then, are the young lady whom the society newspapers describe as the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring?"

"Yes."

"But the Dorking police believe you are a lady's maid or companion?"

"Did Sergeant Linton say that?"

"Yes. The confession nearly choked him, but he had to make it."

"When next I see him, I'll undeceive him. He was very rude to me last night."

"Indeed! Tell me about that."

"Oh, rudeness is a harsh term, perhaps, but he might have been more explanatory when he rang up to say that Monica had been found. How is she?"

"Recovering rapidly, I am told; but let us keep to this matter of Sergeant Linton's rudeness. Ah, sit down, Mr. Hobbs. I'll be ready for you in a moment. I think you are mistaken, Miss Mainwaring. Sergeant Linton had gone through an extraordinary experience, for which, let me say in strict confidence, he is to be promoted and decorated, as he undoubtedly saved Monica Jackson's life by risking his own—risking it knowingly, too. Moreover, the wire was in demand for circulating descriptions of certain persons wanted by the police—very much wanted, I assure you. However, that is by the way. Please tell me, in your own words, all that happened yesterday."

The Hon. Peggy's eyes sparkled for an instant, for she felt that the little detective was treating her like a spoiled child; but sheer interest in the drama in which she had played some small part conquered this momentary pique, and she gave a lucid and consecutive account of events since the breakfast hour of the previous day.

Mr. Hobbs corroborated, though his knowledge was slight. Neither he nor his mistress could supply any information as to the Curzon Street episode, because the malefactors in the car had vanished before the occupants of the house found Foster lying on the pavement.

Furneaux ate while he listened. He spoke once only, to assure his hearers that the detective, though seriously wounded, was regarded by the house surgeon at St. George's Hospital as not being in a hopeless condition.

Foster's vague and faltering recollection of his assailant's appearance seemed to tally with Miss Mainwaring's equally vague portrait of the younger man whom she had seen in the roadway opposite the King's Head.

"It amounts to this," said Furneaux. "One or all of you three people in the tea garden—and Sergeant Linton, almost certainly—may be able to recognize that scoundrel, if you see him again at an early date; or, again, you may not. Are you engaged to-day, Miss Mainwaring?"

"No, not particularly. Indeed, I was thinking of motoring to Dorking to see Monica."

"Just what I was going to suggest. I am calling for Superintendent Winter at headquarters, and then we make straight for Dorking. Will you come with us?"

"Gladly. Shall I order the car?"

"I have one at the door."

Mr. Hobbs cleared his throat as a preliminary to speech, but Furneaux forestalled him.

"Exactly," he said, speaking for him, with much gravity. "Mr. Hobbs was about to warn you against acting on impulse. You really should not be so ready to gad about with mere strangers. I may not be an emissary of Scotland Yard at all, but a plausible villain meaning to carry you off in broad daylight. Even the presence of a police chauffeur is no real safeguard, as uniforms can be bought from any theatrical costumer. Mr. Hobbs, therefore, will accompany us as far as the Embankment, when both he and you will be convinced of my *bona fides*. That all right, Mr. Hobbs?"

The butler had really intended to protest against his young mistress's further participation in this extraordinary affair without Lady Copmanthorpe's cognizance, but yielded instantly to the prospect of a visit to Scotland Yard, with the reflected glory for himself in the servants' hall.

Somehow, Peggy sensed this, and could not help admiring the detective's tact.

"Very well," she said, rising. "I'll just get a wrap, while you finish your toast, Mr. Furneaux. Five minutes—not a second longer."

"Just one moment," he cried. "Are you dressed to-day as you were yesterday?"

"No—oh, no!"

"Please take ten minutes, and change into the same costume. Mr. Hobbs will agree with me, I am sure, when I recommend that your actual identity need not be disclosed at Dorking."

"Won't Monica—"

"Let us take the chance, at any rate."

The butler now regarded Mr. Furneaux as a most sensible person—a model of discretion; but Peggy was sure that the detective was humbugging Hobbs, and probably herself. She was convinced of this when his beady black eyes twinkled in response to her own smile.

She reappeared in the hall well within the stipulated time. The butler, whom Furneaux had warned not to say a word to any one, though he twisted the advice into the semblance of its having originated in Mr. Hobbs's own judicial brain, was already seated by the side of the driver. It was then nine o'clock, and Peggy was actually throwing a dust cloak over her shoulders when the telephone rang.

Furneaux nodded in response to her look of inquiry.

"Better see what is wanted," he said.

Peggy's response to the caller was free from all ambiguity.

"Sorry, Bobby," she said, "but I'm just going out. I really don't know what time I shall return. Of course, you're peeved, old thing, but I can't explain now—I've got to rush. Yes, I'll ring you up at the club, or somewhere. What? Oh, rubbish!

"Lord Robert Ferris," she explained, tripping down the steps. "He was awfully hipped when I wouldn't tell him anything."

"It certainly is difficult, sometimes, to be explicit over the phone," agreed Furneaux. "Linton discovered that last night, I imagine."

Peggy shot a glance at him, but he was opening the door of the limousine.

"I'm sorry to have to take you out of town at such an early hour," he went on, as the car sped through Mayfair; "but, in a case like this, we are desperately anxious to get ahead of the newspapers. You see, by noon to-day all England will hear about Foster and the blowing up of that house at Dorking. We have just two working hours left—"

"The blowing up of what house, Mr. Furneaux?"

"Ah, I forgot! You have not heard what happened last night. Thanks to Linton's really clever action, the police discovered at least one of these rascals' haunts. It was there he rescued Monica Jackson from the immediate death which threatened her in about half a dozen different ways. I said nothing of this before the estimable Hobbs, who would expire from spontaneous combustion if he tried to retain within his portly bosom the sensational story you will hear while we run to Dorking. I suppose you think I am taking you there to cheer up poor Monica Jackson. I'm not. She is ill—very ill—not physically, but mentally. A local doctor thinks she will not recover her speech for a week at least. Indeed, I am doubtful if he will allow you or any one else to see her, lest her memory should return too soon."

He paused — deliberately, his hearer thought.

"I'll ask questions or remain silent, whichever you wish, Mr. Furneaux," she said quietly.

He cracked the forefinger and thumb of his right hand joyously.

"The one woman in ten thousand!" he cried. "Well, here is your reward. I'll tell you something few people know. When I'm up against a really big affair, such as this promises to be, I feel—or think I feel, which is the same thing—the working of a sixth sense, which, in operation, resembles the action of static electricity. Do you know what that is?"

"If it's the new system of reading the meter, it's a horrible fraud."

"A perfect reply, though weak as a definition. When two powerful bodies are in direct electric communication, another current, far less potent, but definite enough, is set up parallel with the known one. It can hardly be accounted for, but it exists, and can be utilized. Some influence of the kind often reveals its presence in criminology. I am sure of it. In the present instance you and Sergeant Linton—quite unconsciously, of course—represent the opposite poles of that minor current which is flowing alongside the stream of evil forces that has drawn you within its area during the past few hours. While I am with either of you, or both, I do honestly believe I shall be in closer touch with some far-reaching and tremendous scheme, or plot, designed for dire purposes whose scope I cannot yet even guess at. And now, please forget what I have told you, because my colleague, Mr. Winter, is convinced that my theorizing is all moonshine. Probably he will say so forcibly, thus leading to a row; and you would be distressed if we bickered all the way to Dorking. Indeed, it would be a sin on this lovely morning."

Peggy laughed.

"If Mr. Winter is as interesting in his way as you are in yours, I shall have the time of my life during the next hour," she said. "But what in the world will happen when I meet Sergeant Linton? Will there be a sizz and a bang?"

"I hope not," replied Furneaux emphatically. "You know what happens when a fuse gives way—all the lights go out, and there is a scurry for candles. May Heaven protect a great many innocent people if we are plunged again into darkness in this case, Miss Mainwaring! I believe, and I say it in all seriousness, that your sharp eyes yesterday, when they saw that half crown burying itself between two curbstones, snatched a lightning glimpse of something which menaces our very life as a nation. But here we are. Have you ever before visited Scotland Yard? Its architecture is beneath contempt, but it is a most interesting place, for all that. Its records range from the secrets of kings to the wanderings of lost umbrellas. Ah, there is Winter, waiting for us! He is not smoking—a bad sign! He is worried. What's gone wrong now, I wonder?"

IX

If the foregoing history of one complete day culled from the hitherto uneventful career of the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring has induced the belief that the young lady in question differed in any material attribute from thousands of girls of her age and social position who are to be found in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia—wherever, in fact, the ideals and the manners of our race are inculcated from birth—such an impression, founded possibly on the tragic incidents with which she was associated by fate, should be dissipated forthwith.

She was merely a good-looking, healthy, well educated, and pure-minded young woman. She had the ease and vivacity which spring from certain fine qualities of heart and brain, when cultivated in an excellent soil and fostered by favorable environment. Owing to her youth, the horrors of the great war had left her unscathed. She was a devoted daughter, a cheerful and amiable friend, an adept in many field sports, yet utterly feminine and unspoiled.

Hitherto, her life had been passed in pleasant places. Now, for the first time, she was brought face to face with some of the sordid elements in human affairs—things which she was hardly able to visualize when she read of them in newspapers and books.

It is not surprising, therefore, that even the spiriting away of the parlor maid and the attempted murder of Foster should fail to penetrate deeply into her immature consciousness. She regarded these happenings as somewhat on a par with a nasty fall after hounds, or with what she herself would describe as a "regular purler" on the ice.

It is true that she was frightened and tearful when the unfortunate detective was carried into the hall of the Curzon Street house by Hobbs and the second footman, and she saw the dread evidence of the murderous attack which had been made on him; but the ingrained instincts of her social order demanded restraint and coolness in all circumstances, and she rose to the occasion, being far more self-possessed than the two men. For the moment, therefore, she was more curious and interested than shocked.

Furneaux, versed in the complex of the feminine mind, appreciated her qualities to the full, and meant to use them without stint until Lord and Lady Copmanthorpe interfered, which would be about one minute by the clock after they realized what sort of amazing experiences their only daughter was being committed to.

Peggy liked Mr. Winter at sight. He was big and solid and preëminently British, a man of oak reënforced by steel. His head, body, and limbs were large and round. His prominent, wide-apart blue eyes and expressive mouth seemed framed for humor and the sheer joy of existence, rather than for the analysis of crime and the pursuit of criminals. Equally with Furneaux, he did not suggest the detective of either romance or actuality. Peggy found herself thinking that she had met many such men at agricultural shows in the shires, or among the guns on her father's moors and pheasant drives.

If Mr. Hobbs was capable of entertaining the suspicions put into his well ordered domestic brain by Furneaux, they were banished forever by the respectful demeanor of those members of the staff at New Scotland Yard who entered or left the building during the couple of minutes the chief stood in the doorway. When Mr. Winter was introduced to Miss Mainwaring, he expressed approval of her presence, though somewhat guardedly. Then he beckoned to a young but grave-looking man in mufti, who seemed to be awaiting orders.

"Sheldon," he said, "I shall be at the Dorking headquarters by noon. Give me a ring, if anything special should turn up. Don't go out until you hear from me. You know as much of this business as I or Mr. Furneaux, so take any action as you think fit, if the occasion arises."

"How odd!" said Peggy, when the car was *en route* again.

"What is it that strikes you as odd, Miss Mainwaring?" inquired Winter, who, to Furneaux's delight, had been eying her covertly.

"The man you spoke to has one eye smaller than the other, or the other eye bigger than the one. Which is it?"

"Both. You are already reported as a close observer. Not many young ladies would have noted such a peculiarity at a glance."

"Is that what Sergeant Linton said about me?"

"Yes, but he also is intelligent."

"Please, won't you smoke?"

Winter instantly whisked around toward Furneaux.

"Have you been taking away my character?" he demanded wrathfully.

Furneaux's wrinkled features registered, as the motion pictures have it, a pained surprise.

"I?" he chirped. "I only said you were not smoking, which is a sign that your normal state of fatuous complacency has been disturbed."

"But won't both of you smoke?" put in Peggy timidly.

She had yet to learn that the Big-Un and the Little-Un of the Yard, when hot on the trail of evildoers, snapped at each other like an ill-tempered mastiff and an impudent terrier.

"The gallant *caballero* by your side, Miss Mainwaring, needs only the merest whiff of encouragement to produce a series of gigantic Havanas, which he partly smokes and partly devours," explained Furneaux bitterly. "This nauseating habit of his is the bane of my life. I hold that tobacco not only tends to atrophy the senses, but—"

" It is a closed car," broke in Winter. " Would you care for a cigarette yourself, Miss Mainwaring?"

" Well, just one, if Mr. Furneaux doesn't really—"

" What? Don't mind him. He has other compensating vices. Now, before he can deliver his stock essay on the deleterious effects of nicotine—of course, not being a smoker, he poses as an authority on the habit—tell me something about Monica Jackson. What sort of girl is she? Would you regard her as of well balanced mind?"

" Oh, yes—she is bright and agreeable, and most willing and contented. Mother says she is a model servant."

" Mother?"

" Yes—Lady Copmanthorpe, you know."

" I ought to have told you that this young lady is the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring," said Furneaux suavely.

Winter did not hesitate a fraction of a second.

" Just so," he said, favoring his aid with a frosty smile. " I have been so busy this morning that the peculiar intricacies of family names in the British peerage escaped my attention. Even in the Yard, Miss Mainwaring, we supply similar puzzles for strangers. For instance, Mr. Furneaux is known as Frog."

" In such trivial matters the aristocracy shows more wit and much better taste than the police," commented Furneaux.

Peggy tittered, though fully alive to the fact that half an hour earlier the little man had been no more aware of her identity than his chief.

" I rather connived at a sort of alibi yesterday," she confessed. " You see, father is ill in Scotland, and mother has rushed away to nurse him, and she would be dreadfully upset if she heard that I was mixed up in this affair. Of course, I shall write her fully to-day, but I really don't want her to see my name in the newspapers first."

" Mr. Winter having now scored heavily all around—mark you, I say ' heavily '—perhaps it will be as well if I reveal what took place near Dorking at a late hour last night," said Furneaux. " I am not usurping my chief's prerogative. It will take him at least five minutes to get that wretched cigar to draw properly."

Thenceforth, for the time being, at any rate, all banter ceased between the two, and Peggy received an astonishingly full and accurate account of the Dorking drama. MacDermott had supplied the whole story over the phone that morning, about half past seven. Some of it was new, even to Winter. When his colleague made an end, he said thoughtfully:

" This man Linton strikes one as being rather out of the common. Who is he?"

" At present an acting sergeant in the Surrey County Constabulary. MacDermott says he will now be made an acting inspector."

The eyes of the two men exchanged an unspoken word. Unknown to Peggy, the chief did not utter the thought in his mind, since it was quite obvious that Furneaux had not answered his question.

" I hope we shall meet him this morning," was what he said.

" Oh, yes—that is arranged. MacDermott sent him to bed about one o'clock, so that he might be fresh for to-day's hazards. Old Mac himself remained up all night. He will not escort us through the ruins, but he promises to have luncheon ready soon after half past twelve."

" It will be thrilling to hear what Mr. Linton really saw when he went into that awful place," commented Peggy.

Her companions looked at her and smiled —Furneaux with approval, and Winter with an air of astonishment.

" It is a pity you are the daughter of a cabinet minister," said the chief. " I could promise you a job in the C. I. D."

" You have a very important one now, at any rate," cried Furneaux.

" Does that mean I am what Americans call a ' live wire '? How flattering! But I feel I know so little, and I dread asking for information."

" Why?" demanded Winter.

" Because—because you two may have in your minds a great many facts which cannot properly be divulged to an outsider like myself."

" No," said Winter reflectively. " That is not so. We have under remand a pestilent fellow who was caught selling a peculiarly dangerous drug in a Regent Street restaurant the other night, and on him was found a half crown marked almost in the same way as the coin that you found. There are indications, too, that the morale of some of the public services is being undermined in a subtle but quite indefinite way. That is all. The combined outrages of last night may or may not be connected with these other circumstances. The whole affair is rather bewildering. It is evident that *mon vieux* and his associates set out for London the moment they ascertained Monica Jackson's address. Their only object, then, could be to force from her some understandable reason why the damaged half crown had been changed for another; but she did not know. Neither did her friend Fred. I incline to the view that in the ordinary course of events she would have been questioned closely, and bundled out of the car unharmed on some lonely road, if she retained her wits, and said nothing about Sergeant Linton; but the appearance of Foster on the scene altered the situation entirely. Her captors saw, then, that the police were on their track, and it was vital for their safety that they should probe the full extent of the girl's knowledge. That is why they kept her under the partial influence of an anæsthetic all the way to Dorking, and threatened her with torture the moment she was allowed to regain her senses. From the manner in which the house was first protected and then destroyed, with a tunnel provided to facilitate the escape of the occupants, it is clear that they expected, sooner or later, to attract the attention of the authorities. That their plan failed was due to no fault of theirs. In this case we have to deal with a master mind, an intelligence of the highest order—"

" You see, therefore, how justice is handicapped from the outset," Furneaux could not refrain from saying.

Winter waved aside the interruption with a certain magnificence of gesture.

" I believe," he went on, " that science, rather than police experience of criminal methods, will have to solve the problems before us. Admitting that a battered half crown does not call for treatment by test tubes and retorts, it is possible that the coin, as a symbol, may have a psychological basis. Whole continents have been plunged into war by queer tokens of the kind. The Indian Mutiny was foreshadowed by the passing from village to village of a *chupatti,* or baked cake made from millet. Africa can supply scores of instances of similarly far-fetched but potent influences. Usually, as Mr. Furneaux knows well enough, I leave to him such strange delvings into the peculiarities of human nature—"

Unluckily, the chief's active brain balked for an instant, so his waspish aid seized the opportunity.

" But as this affair seems to spring from a warped mentality, no doubt you feel competent to analyze it," he broke in.

Sad to relate, for a girl so carefully brought up, Peggy was beginning to enjoy the society of these ridiculous detectives. Her difficulty was to separate the wheat from the chaff in their talk. She could not be quite sure when they were in earnest, and not merely engaged in the harmless pastime generally known as pulling each other's leg.

Being singularly clear-minded, however, she remembered everything they said—literally, that is, and quite apart from the significance the words seemed to bear at the moment they were uttered.

" Why did you ask me if I regarded Monica Jackson as—how did you put it?—of well balanced mind?" she inquired.

" Because she seems to have yielded rather suddenly to the strain placed on her," Winter promptly replied.

" Is she really very ill, then?"

" Not ill, but shocked out of her wits. You see, it is a fair deduction that she was kept in a semiconscious state for an hour and twenty minutes. She is physically uninjured, so she could only have heard certain threats; and, no matter how terrible they may have sounded or appeared, she was not subjected to them longer than five minutes. The very fact that she must have been partly under the influence of an anæsthetic argues a condition of less than normal mental susceptibility. What, then, caused such a collapse that a doctor at Dorking should assure us that her brain will not function properly during the next seven days, at least?"

" Poor Monica!" murmured Peggy, and her eyes glistened with imminent tears.

" Do you know that we are passing the house where Nelson lived for many months at a time, when not at sea?" said Winter, after a pause.

" Please don't stop talking about this horrid business just because I sympathized with Monica's sufferings," protested Peggy.

Winter laughed cheerfully.

" I haven't another word to say about it," he admitted. " I have only been theorizing—a bad habit caught, no doubt, from Mr. Furneaux."

" The only interesting fact you have staged thus far is the reference to Nelson's residence at Merton," snapped the little man. "I suppose even a well brought up young lady like you, Miss Mainwaring, has read of his love affair with Lady Hamilton, and has admired the fair Emma's portraits by nearly all the famous artists of her period. Well, the other day I chanced on the memoirs of a French countess, who, as a little girl, appeared in *tableaux vivants* with Lady Hamilton at Naples, and I was surprised to learn that the lovely creature was very fat."

"Whereas Nelson was thin as a herring," added Winter.

Peggy began to understand that her queerly assorted companions played into each other's hands with singular skill. Indeed, not another word did they utter about the business of the hour until the car was halted at a gate on the left side of the road from Leatherhead to Dorking, and a policeman peered in through the open window.

"Will you please give me your names?" he said.

Then he signed to a colleague to open the gate. MacDermott had certainly taken care that no unauthorized persons should visit the scene of last night's extraordinary occurrences until the police inquiry ended.

X

The car ran on nearly to the front door of the house. It was stopped abruptly by a tall young man in a gray suit, a golfing cap, and brown shoes, who called out to the driver:

"Pull up, or your tires will be cut to ribbons by broken glass!" Then he looked into the car. "May I ask—" he began, but his glance fell on Peggy. "*You* here, Miss Mainwaring?" he cried, evidently prepared to disbelieve his eyes.

"Sergeant Linton?" said Winter.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! I am Superintendent Winter. This is Mr. Furneaux. Fortunately, Miss Mainwaring was at liberty this morning, so we brought her with us."

Linton smiled a welcome, though his reply was strictly official.

"I am glad you are in the center of a police cordon to-day," he said, permitting an appreciative glance to dwell for a moment on the girl's eager, slightly flushed features. "We know now that you were in a position of very real peril yesterday afternoon. It is only the mercy of Providence which saved you from sharing the fate of your friend Monica."

Winter happened to catch an almost imperceptible drooping of Furneaux's left eyelid, so he said nothing, being interested, too, in the Hon. Peggy's attitude. She, however, ignored everything save the apparent implication that Monica's illness had taken a bad turn.

"She is not any worse this morning, I hope?" she said, in quick alarm.

"No—somewhat quieter, the doctor thinks, but he finds it hard to judge, she has swallowed so much bromide. Last night I thought she was dying or dead. By some rascally means she was driven clean out of her senses."

"Ah!" said Winter. "Tell us just what happened after you and the others surrounded the house."

By this time the four were standing on the carriageway between the ruined walls and the flower bed. Linton pointed out the clump of laurels which had screened MacDermott, the two policemen, and himself. In simple, soldierly language he explained the sequence of events.

Two, at least, of his hearers were surprised by his manner and appearance. Winter, of course, had never before either met him or heard him speak. Peggy, who had noted his well bred air during the few words they exchanged outside the King's Head Inn, was even more bewildered now. She knew that an acting sergeant of police must have been an ordinary constable not so long ago, whereas this young man was as well spoken and conventionally correct as her friend and devoted admirer, Lord Robert Ferris.

These minor considerations fled before the tense interest of Linton's recital. He had learned the trick of literal accuracy, rather than using generalities, in stating facts, and Peggy shivered when he told of Monica's horror-stricken cry:

"Ah, no, for God's sake! Not that! Not that! Take it away!"

No one interrupted until he spoke of what he had seen through the broken window—the open black box on the table, the meal spread but not consumed, the hardly visible form of a woman, and the something that had scuttled out of sight under an armchair.

"Scuttled?" cried Furneaux. "Why do you use that word?"

"Well, I hardly know," admitted Linton. " It is the one that occurs to me most readily."

" Might not this thing, whatever it was, have wriggled?"

" Yes." He hesitated a moment. " By Jove!" he cried then, gazing at the diminutive detective with wide-open eyes.

" A snake, of course! What else?" squeaked Furneaux. " What did the first woman hate and dread more than any other created object? Why has every woman born since Eve was expelled from the Garden of Eden hated and feared serpents, though, in countless millions of cases, she may never have seen one save in captivity? That fellow, *mon vieux,* must be a veritable devil. How well he knew how to chill the very soul in an impressionable girl by suddenly producing a snake, which he threatened to allow to bite her if she refused to talk!"

Peggy was too thrilled for words. Linton realized at once that he was listening to a deduction which could only be arrived at by genius; but Winter brought them back to actuality by saying:

" Is that room entirely destroyed?"

" Absolutely, sir. The condition of the outer walls is bad enough, but the interior of the house was consumed by a chemical fire of extraordinary fierceness. It did not rage longer than a couple of minutes, yet look at the havoc it wrought on the trees."

The chief nodded. Those prominent blue eyes of his had taken in a great many details already.

" Have the ruins been searched?" he asked.

" No, sir. Mr. MacDermott persuaded the chief of the fire brigade to leave them as they are. In the first place, no form of life could have survived the flood of poison gas. Secondly, he could not be sure that the firemen themselves might not be sacrificed to no purpose. Thirdly, he wanted you and Mr. Furneaux to find the place untouched by other hands."

" Good! I expected as much from your superintendent, whom I have known for years. Well, sergeant, now that the third chapter of Genesis has supplied a clew, go on with your story."

Linton told of the gas cloud appearing, but glossed over the risk he took in waiting to carry Monica Jackson to safety. He gave a vivid word picture of the explosion and the fire, and of the almost tangible blackness which shrouded the locality when some chemical fire extinguisher was freed, probably by a time fuse.

Cruddas and Tomlin, he explained, were doing well. Cruddas, though apparently the worse injured of the two, had escaped a fatal abdominal wound by the buckle of his belt having diverted the bullet.

" We have found the exit of the tunnel," he went on; " but here again it was decided to await your arrival before searching it. I have a number of gas masks in readiness, and I suggest, with all deference, that they should be worn by those who enter."

" Why?"

" The heavy chlorine gas used in the house would flow into the drains and cellars, and it is doubtful whether either the explosion or the fire would expel it thoroughly. One whiff means instant death. Why take a chance?"

" You took a dozen chances when you ran around that table, grabbed Monica Jackson off the couch, and thrust her through the window," said Winter.

The eulogy made Linton blush like any flurried schoolgirl.

" I acted then without thinking," he explained hesitatingly. " Now, it is different. I have been here for at least an hour, and have had plenty of time to survey the ground."

" What do you say, Furneaux—the tunnel first?"

Winter seemed to be suddenly galvanized into action. He almost startled Peggy by his change of manner.

" By all means," agreed his colleague. " It has probably caved in, but what does that matter? The tunnel is the obvious. Let us get rid of it. Linton, will you act as guide?"

" But, please, what becomes of me?" pleaded Peggy.

" You remain where you are till we come back," ordered the chief.

" May I not walk through the grounds?"

" Mr. Furneaux has just reminded us that young ladies who stroll through gardens unaccompanied are apt to get into mischief; but, if you promise absolutely to keep well away from the house, I see no reason why you should not circle it. Indeed, you may come with us to the mouth of the tunnel. You will be interested. Furneaux in a gas mask is a grotesque of the first order."

" Whereas my respected chief wears one quite naturally," said Furneaux.

Sergeant Linton looked puzzled, as well he might, but Peggy stifled a giggle by a cough.

XI

"By the way, sir," said Linton, as they skirted the dismantled dwelling, "may I ask if there is any news of the gang?"

"None whatever," said Winter. "They seem to have vanished off the map. You were remarkably prompt in circulating those descriptions last night, and I may tell you that we, too, took a hand the instant the report reached us. Every police station within a radius of fifteen miles was stirred into extra activity. On the outskirts of London, between one and five o'clock in the morning, no man or woman passed along the main roads leading from the south who was not scrutinized most carefully; but the result was nil. The inventiveness of the lunatic who expended time, money, and thought in preparing this refuge—or, it may be, headquarters—did not stop short when he and his companions emerged from the tunnel. He had other cards up his sleeve, and, confound him, he may not play them now, as he is well aware that the whole country has been roused. Seen any reporters yet?"

"They are here in scores, of course, but Mr. MacDermott's foresight has kept them at a distance."

"There is a guard over the tunnel, no doubt?"

"Yes—three men."

"Send one to find the newspaper correspondents and tell them that I shall be ready for an interview at Dorking about noon. We must arrange, too, to give the photographers a show, on a strict understanding that no pictures of Miss Mainwaring or you yourself are published. If you spot any one snapping us, go for him at once, and tear the negative out of the camera."

This, thought Linton, sounded more like the real thing. Otherwise—always excepting Furneaux's lightning deduction of the presence of a snake in the dining room when Monica Jackson screamed in terror—these queer detectives spoke and acted strangely.

Next came another perplexity, however, when he saw how quickly they adjusted the gas masks. He was prepared to instruct them in the use of such safeguards, but they were ready before he was, as he had to secure a small cage containing a pair of canaries.

The tunnel emerged in the middle of a thicket of briers. It had a trap door, which could be bolted only from beneath, and a flight of boarded steps led to a gallery walled and roofed by stout planks. Talking, of course, was difficult, but it was hardly needed. By counting paces they had barely reached the foundations of the outer offices of the house before further progress became impossible. Furneaux was right again—the passage had collapsed just where it became important.

Linton turned his torch upon the birds, which were hopping about in alarm, their tiny black eyes seeming to inquire why they were being treated in this fashion. He took off his mask.

"It is all right," he said. "These little fellows are susceptible to the slightest trace of gas in the air."

"So am I," said Furneaux, grabbing Winter by the shoulder. "Let us get out of this, quick!"

Some hint of instant danger in his voice led the others to draw back a hurried pace from the fall of earth in front. There was barely room for two to walk abreast, so Winter led, Furneaux followed, and Linton brought up the rear, though all three were close together.

"What is it now?" demanded the chief.

"The walls are much more solid here—to check the force of the explosion, perhaps—and a thin wire is stretched tightly across the floor at a height of two inches, not a yard short of the fall."

"Let me have a look," said Linton. "That has a familiar sound."

Suiting the action to the word, he crept on again, and sank to his knees, while his companions bent over him. The combined glare of three torches showed clearly what Furneaux's alert sight had already detected. A fine, rusted wire passed between two upright battens on one side, while on the other side it ran from the mouth of a small iron pipe.

"In all likelihood we have just missed exploding a contact mine," said Linton. "This is the sort of thing Heinie used to plant under a *pickelhaube* or a pair of binoculars in an abandoned dugout. Once he used a cross marking the grave of a fallen Highlander. You must have it detonated, as it will be a constant menace."

"A pretty complete job these blighters

made of their arrangements," growled Winter. "Good Lord, what a grudge they must have against the police!"

"I would prefer to discuss the matter further in the open air," urged Furneaux. "This place is distinctly unhealthy. Where one of these infernal machines exists there may be others, and Heaven knows in what nooks and corners that girl is prowling!"

Linton rose so suddenly that he cannoned against Winter.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but Mr. Furneaux is absolutely right."

The chief was well aware that his aid was indulging in a sardonic grin. His own features had lost their good-humored aspect, for he was steeped in conjecture as to the motive underlying so many deadly preparations, made, apparently, before ever a crime was committed.

"Let us pause and consider," said Furneaux, when they stood under the blue sky once more. "On second thoughts, it is evident that if any wire connections existed in the garden, they must have been disturbed long since. Just to make sure, sergeant, you might bring Miss Mainwaring here. Tell her what we have found. It will save time."

Linton darted a sharp look at the little man before he hurried away. Was Furneaux befooling him?

"Now, listen to me, Charles," began Winter severely.

Furneaux's ivory-tinted face wrinkled with delight.

"Why shouldn't we introduce a touch of comic relief into our tragedy?" he cackled. "The cream of the joke is that you don't see it. The Hon. Peggy, only daughter of a peer, who is also a cabinet minister, regards Linton as an ordinary policeman, which vital drawback alone restrains her from flirting with him. Our smart young friend, Captain Arthur Mountstuart Linton, D.S.O., late machine gun officer of the East Kents, happens to be a nephew of the chief constable of a neighboring county; who is retiring next January after thirty-five years' service, and, in the meantime, is keeping the job warm for Master Arthur. As you know, county councils prefer to appoint men with actual police experience, so Linton, whom I regard as a first-rate youngster, is going through the mill in Surrey, and will be an acting superintendent before Christmas. The beauty of the present situation is that he believes Miss Peggy to be a lady's maid, or something of the sort, in the Copmanthorpe household, so he is throttling his obvious admiration for her. Marriage with a girl in her position wouldn't do at all, at all, as they used to say in Cork when Ireland was lazy and happy. In the language of dramatic criticism, the situation is piquant. Pity it can't last more than a day or two!"

"Why should we allow these young people to occupy a false position?"

"False fiddlesticks! A police sergeant may marry a lady's maid!"

"But a peer's daughter would look higher than a county chief constable."

"So, why worry? The only person who has a kick coming is Lord Robert Ferris."

"Who the deuce is he?"

"A young spark in the Guards, deeply interested in the fair Peggy."

"Who told you that?"

"She did, after breakfast."

"You certainly are the limit! I don't know what the commissioner will say to all this if Lord Copmanthorpe cuts up rough."

"James, before we scotch this snake of ours, they will all be hanging on our slightest word."

"Possibly; but here come the two. Now, remember, no more matchmaking! Let events take their course."

"They always do," murmured Furneaux. "Well, sergeant, have you duly alarmed Miss Mainwaring by a realistic description of the unexploded mine?"

"Well, yes."

"Not quite sure, eh?" Furneaux turned his smiling eyes on Peggy. "What has he been talking about?"

"He was rather anxious to learn how I managed to get away from Curzon Street so easily. I explained that my people are in Scotland, so all I had to do this morning was to exercise a Sealyham in the Park, which the second footman is now attending to quite satisfactorily, I hope."

Linton may have wondered why the other three should laugh, as if the girl had said something exceedingly funny. He was, of course, blissfully unaware of the adroitness with which, by being quite candid, she had maintained her rôle.

"Have you propounded any new startling theory during my absence?" he said, rather curtly, for the representatives of the Yard seemed ready to discuss any topic under the sun rather than the serious business of the moment.

"Have we?" inquired Furneaux, gazing at Winter.

"No," said the chief promptly. "Furneaux is itching to spring a surprise on us, but I quelled him until you returned. We are keeping nothing back from you, sergeant. We want you to share fully in this man hunt."

"Then may I venture to tell you first what Miss Mainwaring has discovered? She looked into a damaged rainwater barrel outside the garage — which, by the way, contains a Ford car—and found this."

Linton unfolded a wet rag which had been crumpled up in his right hand, and revealed the back part of the collar of a lady's cloth coat. The material was gray in color and smooth in texture. A bit of merino lining adhered to the cloth, which had been badly charred. Indeed, it appeared to have escaped total destruction only by being blown into water. The vital importance of the exhibit lay in the fact that a tab stitched between cloth and lining bore a name and address: "Maison Marnier, Rue Blanche, Paris," and a number, "17,008."

The detectives examined Peggy's find in silence.

"You're fortunate, Miss Mainwaring," said the chief at last. "We certainly did not err in bringing you here this morning. This may prove more than useful."

He wrote something on a leaf of his notebook, and called a policeman, instructing him to ring up a certain number in Whitehall, to ask for Inspector Sheldon, and to say that Mr. Winter wished him to telephone Paris for information concerning the tab.

"Go to the first house which has a telephone," the chief added. "You'll see the wire."

"Would you mind if he sends the message from Dorking police station?" broke in Furneaux.

"Not in the least."

"There won't be much delay, sir," said the constable. "I have a bicycle at the gate."

"You and I were really thinking of the same thing, chief," said Furneaux, seating himself beneath a tree, and tucking his knees within his arms. "As usual, you are material, I psychic. I know you loathe the word, but it is descriptive, and sufficiently vague. My line of reasoning is clear enough. Our opponents can hardly have failed to learn, by this time, that none of the Dorking police suffered by the destruction of the house. They may even have found out that Monica Jackson was rescued. Therefore, they are anxious now to make sure that the mine in the tunnel has not failed. You seem to understand these fiendish contrivances, Sergeant Linton. Tell me, what is a simple method of detonation?"

"One might pay out a length of strong cord from a safe distance, attach it to the wire, and pull hard when all was clear."

"Splendid! If only we had the cord!"

Linton laughed, as he stooped over a folded mackintosh which had concealed the cage.

"Pardon this display of omniscience," he said; "but here it is. Allow me to explain that I intended it merely for measurements, if needed."

"Ah, you are young enough to afford to throw away opportunities! I, in your place, would have paralyzed my hearers by producing the cord in silence."

"We take that for granted," said Winter dryly. "What are you driving at? If you imagine I had in mind any such idiotic scheme—"

"You'll be sorry you said that, James," cackled Furneaux, in the high-pitched tone he adopted almost insensibly when thoroughly aroused. "What I meant by the allusion to your materialistic brain was that you thought of the neighboring houses as containing telephones, whereas I, using some sensitive mental equipment which God has given me, regarded them only as possible observation posts for the enemy. The same remark holds good of nearly every tree among the thousands on two hillsides. A scout posted anywhere within half a mile can easily follow our every action through binoculars or a telescope."

Winter lighted a cigar. Furneaux, with the reticence of a skilled actor, affected a humility which ignored his chief's failure to offer further criticism.

"Consequently, I suggest now that a great display be made of hunting around for spades and pickaxes. Something of the kind must exist in the outhouses."

"We have a supply in readiness," said Linton.

Furneaux eyed the sergeant with seeming disfavor.

"Young man," he chirped, "your prevision is almost uncanny. It might disturb me if I had not seen those useful implements stacked in the front shrubbery. Have you a two-foot rule?"

"A six-foot rule."

"And a pocket compass?"

"Yes."

"Pray keep them. They are not necessary. I only want you to refrain from interruptions. As I was saying, we four, presuming we have been seen already, go down into the tunnel, accompanied by four strong-armed bobbies armed with trench tools. The policemen should remove their hats and tunics, leaving them out of sight in front of the house. Once we have descended the steps, we crawl out again. You will have noticed that the dry brake in which the trap door is situated is well screened by trees and undergrowth. If Miss Mainwaring does not object to risking some damage to her skirt and blouse, seven of us should be able to creep some thirty yards or so, unseen. If we lie flat, we ought to be fairly safe there, I take it?"

He paused. Winter looked at Linton, who remained silent.

"Our authority on mines does not dispute the statement," went on Furneaux glibly. "Sergeant Linton, meanwhile, who is unanimously elected to the post of honor, arranges his demonstration. When the explosion occurs, if it does occur, there ought to be plenty of smoke and dust to enable us—the whole eight, I trust—to gain the shelter of the trees in front of the house without detection. I see no reason why I should consider our next course of action. Before the rocket goes up, we must post on the main road, at a distance of a mile, or somewhat less, two strong and well-armed patrols, who will stop and inquire into the business and identity of any adult passing in either direction leading from this locality, being especially careful in their examination of cyclists and the like. Foreign servants, hurrying on their employers' affairs, should be detained without discrimination, and this instruction should hold good till"—he consulted a wrist watch—"say half past eleven, after which hour traffic will be allowed to flow freely once more. The patrols can almost disregard people hurrying this way. If the mine is sufficiently noisy, it will cause all the alarm and confusion the most exacting stage manager could ask for."

"Please, will there be any danger for—for any one?" inquired Peggy timidly.

"Sergeant Linton, an expert in such matters, assures us that the operation is simplicity itself."

At any other time, Furneaux would have chortled over the girl's anxiety and the embarrassed flush that tinted Linton's bronzed features with russet; but his eyes had met Winter's, and some occult message passed between the two.

"The plan is worth a trial," announced the chief suddenly, with the air of a man who had made up his mind to risk much on an uncertainty. "Let us get busy at once."

"One moment, sir," broke in Linton, and his voice had a curiously authoritative ring. "It must not be forgotten that the period of risk covers at least five seconds after the explosion. If it is a heavy one, balks of timber and large stones may be hurled over a periphery extending hundreds of feet, though I admit that the probable object of the mine is only to kill any one in the tunnel when it is fired. In any event, Miss Mainwaring must be protected. You must all lie flat on your faces, and remain there till I shout 'All clear!' The men should endeavor to shield Miss Mainwaring with their bodies. Choose a place under a large tree. I recommend that oak a little higher up. I'll not detonate the mine until you tell me you are ready."

"Don't be alarmed on Miss Mainwaring's account," cried Furneaux. "Fate is by way of being a humorist. If any one gets a rap on the head from a falling brick, it will be the author of this particular star turn."

Winter nodded, however, so Linton said no more. Indeed, he was silenced effectively by being requested to remain with the young lady whom he was so anxious to safeguard while the detectives carried through the preliminary arrangements.

"Didn't lose any time in taking command, did he?" snapped Furneaux under his breath, as he and the chief hurried away. "He wanted to bite old MacDermott's head off when he was ordered not to chase three or four armed criminals through a dark wood last night. Mac told me he stalked off like a haughty peer."

"Shut up, you imp! He's a plucky lad, and you know you love him for it."

"Shield her with our bodies, indeed!"

"Well, he couldn't possibly have meant you."

"Ah, you felt the barbed dart, too! Why not admit it? You are infernally short-tempered this morning. You must have risen too early. You beefy fellows require plenty of sleep.

> "Oh, magic sleep! Oh, comfortable bird
> That broodest o'er the troubled sea of the mind
> Till it is hushed and smooth.

"Of course, you don't read Keats. Who does, nowadays? Yet, he was a great poet, and he wrote those lines in the inn at Burford Bridge, which you see nestling in this delightful valley less than a mile away."

"Never have I known of any quotation being dragged in by the scruff of the neck more disgracefully," snorted Winter.

They were passing the two policemen guarding the tunnel, who heard all they were meant to hear of this conversation.

"Them's the swell 'tecs from the Yard," muttered one to his comrade.

"Well, if you hadn't tole me, I'd ha' thought they was a pair of lunatics, by their talk," said the other.

"If they are, it's a case of set a thief to catch a thief. The chaps who blew up this fine house for nothing must ha' been balmy, too."

"Who's the girl?"

"How do I know? She come down with them two. Our smart sergeant has made a hit in that quarter."

"Oh, Mr. Linton's all right. He don't look at no girls; an' he can keep his eyes shut at other times, as well. I was havin' a pint in the yard of the Black Bull the other evenin', an' me in uniform, too, when in comes his nibs an' another toff in a car. Of course, he was off duty, but he pretended he never saw a thing."

Nevertheless, the "smart sergeant" was deeply interested in Miss Margaret Mainwaring. The Yard was hardly out of earshot before he apologized for his abruptness over the phone the previous night.

"I could not help myself," he explained, with a frank smile which the Hon. Peggy regarded as uncommonly attractive. "You see, I am rather a novice in a big affair such as this promises to be, so I did not know how far I might be justified in telling you what had happened. In fact, I took a chance in ringing you up at all."

"Then you have not been a policeman very long?" said Peggy, hoping to make amends, even to her own conscience, for her overnight irritation by showing some degree of sympathy with his hopes of professional advancement.

"No—only about six months."

"Haven't you got on very rapidly?"

"Yes, I am fortunate in that."

"I suppose it's horribly wrong of me, but I do feel I want to be the first to tell you, if you don't know it already. You're to be made an inspector for what you did last night."

Evidently he was surprised.

"How can you possibly be sure of that?" he cried.

"Mr. Furneaux said it. Some one told him—a chief constable, I think. For goodness' sake don't let on I said a word about it. I believe he thinks well of me, and I should be sorry to lose his good opinion."

"But, if the authorities make me an inspector, what will they do for you? You are the person really responsible for discovering these scoundrels."

"Oh, Mr. Winter has as good as offered me work at headquarters already."

Linton reddened with vexation.

"I would have credited him with more sense," he growled. "A girl like you to get mixed up with the sordid affairs that the police have to deal with! Had it been that warped genius, Furneaux, I could have understood it; but a sensible fellow like Winter!"

"Pray don't be alarmed! I shall not accept any position in the Yard. Yet, if you don't care so much for police duties, why are you a policeman?"

"I cannot help myself; and this sort of thing is a man's job."

"The everlasting distinction of sex! I thought we women had won our proper places in the war!"

"Oh, you did—a thousand times over. You were wonderful, angelic. I cannot understand how any nurse or woman worker in a munition factory remains unmarried. The men at the front, who could best judge of their splendid qualities, were lost in admiration for them."

"Did you lose your heart to a nurse or a munition worker?"

He laughed at that.

"No," he admitted. "For one thing, I was not hit. For another, I have never, to my personal knowledge, set eyes on a factory girl. You, of course, were a flapper in those days."

"Is that an excuse, or a mere drawback?" asked Peggy.

"What? About you being a flapper?" He hesitated, and seemed to compel the next words. "It was just an idle comment —a stupid *non sequitur.* Sorry! I mean—"

"I know what *non sequitur* means. 'Followers not allowed' in the kitchen."

"Somehow," he said, looking her straight in the eyes, in a rather troubled way, she thought, "I cannot picture you living in the servants' hall."

"Oh, I don't," she tittered. "I dwell much nearer the attic; but isn't it rather scandalous that we should be talking about ourselves? You ought to be sitting down and thinking hard. You have no idea how I bothered my poor little brain last night, after Monica was carried off."

Now a woman may break away willfully from a discussion which comes perilously near the border line of undisguised flirtation; but she is apt to be astonished, if not slightly annoyed, when the man follows suit. Linton discovered that Miss Mainwaring's sprightliness vanished as soon as he began to analyze the few actual facts of the mysterious incidents which had brought them there that day; so he, in turn, was puzzled and rather distressed.

Indeed, each was aware of a diffidence, a drawing apart, which contrasted oddly with the interest each had felt in the other only a few minutes earlier. There was a growing tension. They curbed both looks and words. It was almost a relief when the representatives of the C. I. D. returned with four coatless and hatless policemen carrying spades and pickaxes.

"Our apologies for the stage wait," cried Furneaux, after the first inquisitive glance. "Everything is in train now, however. In five minutes by the clock Dorking should be roused once more from the sleep of ages!"

XII

"SACRÉ NOM D'UN NOM!" squeaked Furneaux, when the stricken air was still once more, and the last stone or clod of earth had fallen. "There were no half measures about those blighters!"

His excited comment was more than justified by the explosion that Sergeant Linton brought about when he jerked the cord attached to the suspicious wire in the tunnel. The sky seemed to be rended as by some stupendous levin bolt. The earth trembled. Houses shook in Dorking, a mile and a half distant, and windows rattled in Leatherhead, several miles away.

As for dust and smoke, they constituted a noonday pall that would have screened an army corps, let alone the few people who wished to get away unseen from the near neighborhood of the tunnel. Linton had warned his companions that it would be well if they stuffed a finger into each ear when he gave the premonitory signal. Of course, few obeyed, and, as a result, they were stunned into momentary silence—all except Furneaux, who would probably have something to say if he heard the last dread trump of the archangel proclaiming the day of judgment.

Linton was waving the others away from the direct path to the house, and they knew that he suspected the presence of gas. After a few yards of detour, however, he admitted that he might have been unnecessarily careful in this respect.

"I thought I knew the smell of most high explosives," he confided to Winter, "but this is a new one on me. It has a peculiarly disintegrating effect, too. I took a peep at the hole, and noticed that the wooden supports and roof of the tunnel were blown to splinters. Those fellows meant to make an end of any one who disturbed the wire. The mine was planted twenty feet, or more, nearer the exit."

"Which means, I suppose, that if we happened to escape the full force of the blast, we should now be buried alive," growled the chief, whose ordinarily cheerful aspect had yielded to a most determined frown. "Very well! There is nothing I like better than a fight to a finish, but I certainly would be grateful to any one who told me what all the row is about. Now, Miss Mainwaring, sit inside the car. Not feeling bad, I hope?"

"Rather breathless," said Peggy, with quite a valiant smile. "The bang reminded me of a bomb that fell close to our house during a daylight air raid."

"It had the same intent," broke in Furneaux. "Each was a blow meant for the heart of England."

He spoke so seriously that they all looked at him. Winter seemed to be about to utter some comment, but checked himself.

"I suggest that we should defer a detailed examination of the premises until after I have dealt with the press," he said. "I am at a loss to know what story to give them. The most plausible explanation of the existence of a fortified post in the middle of Surrey is that the place has been a den of coiners, or counterfeit note printers, or both."

"The young men who represent the press nowadays are intelligent above the average," murmured Furneaux.

"Unfortunately we have to remember that the chief commissioner dislikes the broadcasting of sensational yarns by the police," growled Winter.

"Admitted; but, while avoiding the twopenny colored version, why not publish the penny plain one?"

"What? Beginning at Box Hill yesterday afternoon?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, leave me out of it!" pleaded Peggy.

"We'll do that, for everybody's sake," said Furneaux instantly. "Nevertheless, it is hopeless to expect that we can prevent the newspapers from linking the attack on Foster with what has happened here. Some chatty cop must long since have blurted out a few of the striking facts connected with last night's doings. Just consider the position. Three policemen and one of Lord Copmanthorpe's servants are lying dangerously wounded as the outcome of a series of felonies, each obviously connected with the other. The whole countryside has twice been plunged into an uproar by terrific explosions. Look at the Dorking road now! As you would have said when in Artois, Sergeant Linton: 'The cloud of dust rising from the *pavé* reveals the passage of a large number of vehicles traveling at high speed.' I recommend, chief, that you leave word at the gate of your intention to keep the appointment already made for noon at police headquarters in the town. Then the newspaper men will hurry after you, and, meanwhile, you will have time to consider how far you can go in the way of hints as to the truth. The sooner we get Lord Copmanthorpe's name into this inquiry, the better."

"But why?" demanded Peggy, and her tone was so imperious that it surprised Linton.

"Because we ought to scare cabinet ministers, and others in high places, to take all necessary precautions for their own safety," came the prompt reply. "If the government can be persuaded that a really dangerous conspiracy against the state is in active existence, the less difficulty we, the guardians of law and order, shall have in devising and carrying out defensive measures. We are handicapped heavily enough, as matters stand. It is a fixed principle of the British constitution that the police may be shot, stabbed, blown up, bludgeoned, or otherwise destroyed by enterprising criminals at all convenient times and places, but woe betide the unhappy detective or constable who shoots first! There is hardly a coroner in the land who would not be eager to commit him for trial on a charge of willful murder."

"Quite true," said Winter grimly. "Here comes the first newspaper car. Sit well back, Miss Mainwaring. Let no one see you clearly."

By this time they were at the gate. Winter assured the first flight of journalists that there would be no more sensational occurrences at the Avenue House—which, according to a resident in the locality, was the accepted name of the place.

With much difficulty, owing to the congested traffic, they passed slowly along the Dorking road. Near the Burford Bridge Hotel they were stopped by a police cyclist patrol, who informed them that a foreigner on a bicycle had been stopped and taken to headquarters.

"Did he say anything—make any protest?" inquired Winter.

"Yes, sir," answered the policeman. "He raised a regular row, making out that he was going into the town to telephone for seats at a theater."

"Did he tell you where he lives?"

"At the house over there, sir." The man pointed to a residence on the west side of the valley, whereas Avenue House stood on the eastern slope. "As a matter of fact, we spotted him riding down to the road, so we were ready for business when he came bowling along."

"Capital! Let the reporters pass, but keep a sharp eye on others until the time is up. If any one tries to bluff you, be sure and bring him or her along."

Linton, of course, was deeply interested in the words and actions of the two detectives. Hitherto, with few exceptions, he had regarded their utterances as verging on the fantastic, but now he was beginning to doubt his own sagacity. He would never have dared to plunge half a dozen parishes into an uproar by blowing up the mine. If, as a direct consequence, some accomplice of the actual criminals fell into one or both of the police traps on the highroad, in future he would blindly obey these queer representatives of the C. I. D.

"There's our catch!" exclaimed Winter, as the car slowed up on approaching the police headquarters.

Two motor bicycles and an ordinary pedal machine were balanced against the curb. One constable remained with them, and his right hand rested unobtrusively in a pocket. The other was shepherding a short, stockily built fellow into the police station.

"Ever seen him before?" said the chief, turning suddenly on Linton.

"No, sir—not to my knowledge," was the ready answer.

"Tell that cyclist constable not to give any attention to the man, if he comes out again. Take Miss Mainwaring to Superintendent MacDermott's house, and leave her there. Then return here, watch Mr. Furneaux from a distance, and be ready to help him if required."

As neither of the detectives had said a word bearing on any new project, the younger man was puzzled, but his training had taught him to carry out definite orders without question. Peggy, of course, acknowledged no such silent acceptance of the incomprehensible.

"What's going to happen now?" she said, in a half whisper, as her escort led her a little higher up the street.

Linton laughed.

"I've got to watch Furneaux," he said. "That should be quite exciting in itself."

"But, please, why shouldn't I watch Furneaux, too?"

"Because the O. C. says you're to make the acquaintance of Mrs. MacDermott, who is a dear, motherly old soul. Have no fear, Miss Mainwaring. You will hear everything at luncheon, if not sooner."

Linton himself began to have an inkling of coming events when Furneaux came and asked where the telephone exchange was situated. Meanwhile, Winter had met Superintendent MacDermott, and the prisoner—who might be better described, as yet, by the French word *détenu*—was brought into MacDermott's private office.

"Who are you?" began the chief, with an agreeable smile.

The man, evidently striving to cloak his alarm under an air of truculence, seemed to mistrust this friendly reception.

"Why am I arrest, in ze street, so?" he said, his gruffness of tone probably concealing agitation.

"You are not arrested. You have simply been asked to come here and explain why you were hurrying to the telephone."

"I go London dissa evenin', yes, an' I tell my Margherita—vat you say, my girl—go getta two seat at de *teatro*, an' one damn polisman pulla me offa my bicycle. Vat for?"

"I'm sure we are very sorry to have troubled you; but you have not yet told me your name."

"Pietro Ruffini."

"Ah! And what is your occupation?"

"I do ze work in ze garden for Mistaire Thistleton."

"At Holly Lodge?" put in MacDermott.

"Yes, sare."

"Italian?" said Winter suavely.

"*Si—da Genova.*"

"How long have you been in Mr. Thistleton's service?"

"Seex mont'."

"Well, I must apologize for a mistake. We are all liable to that, you know. I suppose you know nothing about the people who lived in Avenue House?"

"No, sare."

"Very good! You may go. We have not kept you very many minutes from the telephone."

Ruffini looked rather bewildered, but hurried out at once. MacDermott, though perplexed for the moment, merely remarked that the fool might have saved himself some trouble by using Mr. Thistleton's phone.

"I guessed as much," grinned Winter. "It's all right. He's just the sort of sulky idiot who believes the British police can be humbugged easily, as he knows from past experience that he would have been handled quite differently in Italy. Now you and I are going to interview the press. I think the story ought to begin in Curzon Street at ten o'clock last night. The discovery of Monica Jackson's presence in Avenue House, soon after eleven, arose from the fact that the inmates were already under observation owing to certain suspicious circumstances, which cannot be gone into at the moment. Not a syllable about the half crown, Linton, and Miss Mainwaring! We account for the attack on Monica by our belief that a gang of international criminals is trying to bring about a social and political upheaval in England. They abducted a member of Lord Copmanthorpe's household in order to obtain information as to his lordship's movements during the next few days. Lawbreakers are always interested in the Home Secretary. But, first of all, what have you learned of *mon vieux* and his associates?"

"The house agent says that a Frenchman, M. Jules Lefèvre, bought Avenue House nine months ago, posing as an enthusiastic amateur gardener. He paid cash for the place—four thousand pounds in Bank of England notes; and for that reason his references were never taken up. I have them here, and they seem to be first-rate—a bank and a firm of stockbrokers."

"We must let the reporters have the names."

"Yes—the publicity will draw either explanation or denial. The only letters ever delivered there were gas and electricity accounts, and demands for the rates, which were paid in cash by a housekeeper, who also did the marketing. The telephone was cut off, at M. Lefèvre's request."

"Ah!"

"Yes—that struck me as peculiar; but, of course, one sees now that the occupants were afraid of some one listening in."

"One word, and then we must face the reporters. You're an old hand at the game, Mac. Have you formed any sort of theory, no matter how far-fetched it may sound, which will account for these extraordinary doings?"

"I have never been so much at sea in all my years of police work," admitted MacDermott ruefully. "The ruin has not been entered, as I am aware of Furneaux's little fads in such matters, but I did peep in from the hall. The stairs have gone. In a big space beneath, where there may have been cellars, I saw some remnants of glass testing tubes and fused copper fittings. If such a thing were feasible, I would have suspected that the place had been used for distilling spirits."

"And why not?"

The older man smiled.

"You know better than I that the precautions against discovery were too elaborate and deadly for that simple explanation," he said.

"Yet it all depends on the sort of hell brew they were concocting," mused Winter aloud. "They say that there are factories in Germany to-day where a peeping stranger would probably meet with short shrift. Well, now for the newspapers and a national uproar!"

Knowing his men, Winter arranged to meet the journalists again at three o'clock on the scene of operations. The evening papers were selling already in the streets of London and other towns, with big headlines. They contained brief reports describing the second explosion, and connecting it with prior events. Later editions would carry a fairly complete story. The morning newspapers would demand photographs, plus a midnight telephonic inquiry as to developments, if any, before going to press.

Winter trusted to luck, and to the confusion of the past half hour, that no local correspondent had heard as yet of the arrest of Pietro Ruffini. Therein his hope was justified. He had to answer many questions, but none as to the reason why a local Italian gardener should be suspected because he wished to take some unknown Margherita to a London theater that night.

MacDermott, well versed in the peculiar ways of his friends from Scotland Yard, was by no means as much surprised as he would have been otherwise when, at the conclusion of the conference with the newspaper men, he found in his office a stubborn and ugly-looking Ruffini. The man's hands were handcuffed behind his back. His face was bruised, and one eye was closing rapidly, not to open properly again for several days.

"Ah!" cried Winter cheerfully. "You fought, did you, my Italian friend?"

"The people in the telephone exchange saw something worth while," grinned Furneaux. "It was a hefty scrap, short but lively. Linton has gone to change his clothes, as his coat was badly torn, but he reports no other damages. I must say he tackles superbly. Must have played football in his time!"

"Anything urgent?"

"Well, yes. It all depends on whether Superintendent MacDermott decides to charge Signor Ruffini with complicity in the attempts to murder already committed or allows him to give away his associates."

"Nevaire! Nevaire!" shouted the prisoner savagely.

He could have bitten his tongue when he saw the detectives and MacDermott grin broadly.

"Just so!" chortled Furneaux. "Five minutes ago you were protesting that you did not understand why you should have been arrested twice, though you fought hard enough the second time, when you realized that you had been tricked. You see," he went on, pretending to ignore his victim, " this imbecile made straight for the telephone office when released, and asked for a telephone number in Soho. Naturally, there was a little delay, as the local people had to be assured by authority that a complete stranger, who ' didn't look a bit like a policeman', as one of the girls put it, should be allowed to listen in. As a matter of fact, I myself put the call through. I tried to get the inspector at Vine Street on the job, but Pietro was becoming restive, so I had to take a chance and give him his number. I believe, but am not sure until inquiry is made, that a woman answering to the name of Margherita Dubois was waiting in some Soho restaurant for this call, and vanished at once after being summoned to the instrument. She gave her name when Pietro inquired, and he said, in Italian: ' Eleven fifteen. Apparently quite successful. Three men and a woman, who came in a car, and four others, who seemed to be policemen.' Why did you think those four were policemen, Pietro?"

The question was shot at the prisoner so suddenly that he started; but he recovered his wits quickly, and snarled an oath.

" The lady was fully satisfied with this information, and hung up," continued Furneaux. " As to what occurred during the next twenty seconds, Sergeant Linton will now enlighten us, as I hear his step."

There was a knock on the door.

" Come in!" shouted Superintendent MacDermott.

Linton entered. Furneaux had brought off one of the minor effects in which his soul delighted. MacDermott affected indifference, but the station sergeant, a burly fellow who had mounted guard over the Italian, looked flabbergasted. Neither they, nor even Winter, it must be confessed, had heard any one approaching. Indeed, they could hardly have been certain of the newcomer's identity had they been on the *qui vive* for his appearing.

" Tell the present company what happened after Ruffini came out from the telephone booth," said Furneaux, addressing Linton as if the latter had heard the whole conversation.

Linton, whose respect for the little man had grown by leaps and bounds since the discovery of the mine and its striking results, was ready now for any oddity of word or action emanating from one whom he regarded as a veritable genius. He had changed into a blue serge suit, and Winter noticed, with approval, that he had selected a tie which matched it.

" I was looking in at the door," he said instantly, " and caught your signal, so I closed with Ruffini at once."

" Without speaking?" put in Winter.

" Yes, sir—it was advisable. When we got him down, we took an automatic from his breast pocket and a dagger from his belt."

" We?"

" Mr. Furneaux assisted me splendidly."

" How?"

" By grabbing his ankles and lifting his feet in the air. That put him completely out of action."

" A mere trifle, but mine own," chirped Furneaux.

" Did he resist?" went on Winter.

" Well, yes, he did. He tore my coat and waistcoat."

" Did you hit him?"

" No. He—er—acquired that black eye by having his face jammed against the floor."

" Capital! Sorry I missed the turn. How much did Dorking see of it?"

" Nothing. I closed the door as I entered, and the telephone attendants have promised to keep mum. Mr. Furneaux and I linked arms with him as we came here, and I don't think any one noticed us."

Winter eyed Ruffini reflectively for a few seconds. He was convinced that even if such a rascal offered to betray the gang to which he belonged, he could not be trusted. The man's calculating look was eloquent. No doubt he was already planning to befool the police.

" Put him in a cell," said the chief to the station sergeant. " If you approve, Mr. MacDermott, let him be charged, for the time being, with intent to commit a felony and carrying concealed weapons. You can deal with him later for other offenses."

" Before he goes, however," said Furneaux, " he may as well know that we understand exactly what a half crown marked with a number in Roman numerals means."

That Parthian shot told. The Italian's swarthy face paled. Nevertheless, an iron resolution—or, it may be, a greater fear than any engendered by the law—kept his tongue still; so he was taken off to a cell.

(*To be continued in the March number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

N. Terwilliger Takes the Bumps

THE ROMANCE OF A RATHER UNUSUAL GIRL AND A VERY UNUSUAL YOUNG MAN

By Louise Kennedy Mabie

I HESITATE to introduce Mr. N. Terwilliger Lamb, for in these days your hero who " gets across " must be virile, large-chested, deep-hearted, and strong-lunged. If to these qualities it is possible to add curly black hair, an absence of gold teeth and a striking manner of beating up the trusting little blond lady who is just putting her timid foot to the path that leads to " stylish stouts," your magazine editor prints him without reading the last installment, and your motion picture director screens him in chunks.

Now Mr. N. Terwilliger Lamb was none of these things. He was pale-eyed, straw-colored, thin, and mild. He knew so little of trusting young blond ladies as really to admire them. His shoulders were slightly stooped, and he felt raw weather keenly. He would close up the windows of his shabby little tin car against sleet and wind and snow, and would sit among his brushes and beneath his thin overcoat and shiver and shake.

There's another thing. His job! We've postponed the inevitable for a paragraph, but it has been looming ahead. It must be lovely to dig up a hero with a manservant, and a bath, and monogrammed cigarettes given to him by Lady Clarissa Bellchambers, and no job whatever. One could enjoy a hero who tamed lions in a circus or bears in Wall Street. It is understood that romance lurks only in the souls of violent, venturesome persons. Who ever heard of a romantic postman, for instance? Or of a forceful florist? Or of a captain of industry who sold brushes from door to door over a limited section of New Jersey? The very State hampers us at the start, the very city, the very street.

" I'll say for him that he's neat," asserted Mr. Lamb's landlady thoughtfully, viewing him from the kitchen window, as he backed his battered car out of the garage in the chill blue light of a wintry morning. " He wears seven clean collars a week, and he darns his socks. He's got a little thimble to do it with. He's mannerly at table, too. He don't make a bit of a fuss with his soup."

" Can it, ma!" yawned Mabelle Virginia McCann, the landlady's blond daughter. " He's got about as much pep as a dead fish on ice!"

Meanwhile N. Terwilliger Lamb, making his calls from door to door, had to buck against the tempers of housewives made irritable by the snow in front of their residences, by the banked ashes in the kitchen range and the frozen tap in the garage, and by the fact that black Bertha had languidly phoned that she " didn't feel so busy today," and " wouldn't be along." Mr. Lamb, throughout the morning, raised his brown fedora at just the right angle, smiled enough and not too much, and boosted his brushes so enthusiastically that they overtopped by the necessary fraction of an inch all other brushes in the known world.

" Hearth brushes, floor brushes, window brushes, sink brushes!" chanted N. Terwilliger at each narrowly opened door. " A little higher in price, *but*—madam, if one of our little World Beaters should enter your home, it would work a revolution, it would insure hitherto unknown hours of ease, it would soothe, it would satisfy—"

"Uh-uh! Would it clean?" asked the lady whose one cold eye at the crack of the door was all of her personality N. Terwilliger could grasp at and hold.

"Would it clean?" said N. Terwilliger, discarding lyric patter to address a real prospect. "Say, our brushes have been recently installed in the public schools of this and the adjacent State. Madam, our brushes serve banks, city halls, jails, the mansions of the rich, the cottages of the more intelligent poor. They never shirk. They never stall. They never refuse. An outfit of World Beaters could clean up the State Legislature. All we need," he added, with a purposeful twinkle of his eye, and with the manner of one letting a friend in on a pleasantry, "is improved transportation in order to sweep the Milky Way!"

"Uh-uh!" slowly, consideringly. "Well, there was a fella here last week give away a sample—"

"Madam," said N. Terwilliger at this point, with the light touch of an artist on a finished composition, "we give away a sample, and we have also a special proposition for a deferred payment system on liberal terms."

At this point the crack of the door would widen — not invariably, but frequently—and the lady's gray sweater would stand revealed.

"Walk in," she would say—not invariably, but frequently. "I might need a good floor brush. I may as well see what yuh got."

After a particularly successful morning, N. Terwilliger would stop at Mary's for doughnuts and a cup of coffee, or sometimes, if his sales warranted extravagance, for the luxury of ham and eggs. To-day, lunching late at his usual table, and figuring on the corner of an envelope, he decided that he might be able to swing the thing in ten years. After a second cup of coffee, figuring forcibly, he brought the years down to eight and a half. They stretched before him on the envelope in a slow, bleak, toiling procession:

"Hearth brushes, floor brushes, window brushes, sink brushes! A little higher in price, madam—"

But ah, the glory at the end of the trail—the rose-covered bungalow, the orange trees, the sunshine that warmed, that healed, that blessed, the sunshine that didn't fail; and in the doorway—here N. Terwilliger caught his breath and almost covered his eyes—a blond glory that was her hair, and warm breast that was to be his haven!

II

"Say, young fella, I'm sorry," said a big voice in N. Terwilliger's ear. "I'm darned sorry, but I couldn't help it."

As N. Terwilliger, still dazed from his dream, stared up dumbly, a huge hand gripped his shoulder and shook him gently.

"Bess," said the big voice, "you mountain cat, look at what your claws have raked up this time!"

Over the shoulder of a huge gentleman in raccoon peered the large, high-colored, jade-earringed face of a lady in squirrel. Both looked down upon N. Terwilliger smilingly, pityingly, with a certain air of diffidence. They were sorry, darned sorry, for something, N. Terwilliger gathered, but they were also a little amused.

He cleared his throat, which felt raw this bleak day, and which had acquired a sudden lump.

"I—I don't understand," he quavered bravely.

"She picks 'em out," explained the raccoon gentleman agreeably. "She's got a system that can't fail. She eats 'em alive. She's smashed three of 'em coming up from Florida. We're touring the U. S., you understand—been on the road since last October. I'm from L. A., myself, and so's my wife. Shake hands with the wife, young fella, and let her tell you you ain't got any car."

"No car?" quavered N. Terwilliger. "But I have a car. I use it in my business. I left it just outside—"

"Young fella," said the big man deliberately, "your car has gone where the smashed cars go. It's honking its horn in paradise."

In the face of Mary's urgent placard—"Gents, don't smoke—ladies neither"—he drew from its case a long black cigar and lighted it judicially.

There fell a brief silence.

N. Terwilliger, wishing to rise in his galoshes because of the large lady's perfumed presence, wishing to rise in spirit and leap over this chasm bravely, heroically, found that he could do neither. He drew out his pocket handkerchief of near linen, and wiped his brow, his lips. Unobtrusively, apologetically, he blew his nose; but his hands trembled, his thin knees shook, and his teeth had begun a persistent little chattering tune of their own. It was as if they had taken charge of the situation, and were trying, mistakenly but with the best intentions in the world, to set it to music.

Glancing up at the large lady in the fear that she might be hearing the uncontrollable teeth, he smiled at her wanly.

"It—it wasn't really a—a car," said N. Terwilliger gallantly. "No company would insure it. Don't—don't feel badly about it, madam. All that held it together was the paint."

"Now, papa, I call that sweet!" the large lady decided instantly. "D'ye remember that raving lunatic in Richmond when all I did was crumple up his bumpers? And the guy in Albuquerque that squirted his fire extinguisher on us? Stacked against them hoodlums, papa, he's a gentleman. We buy him a whole car this afternoon, if I have to hock my emerald anklet!"

"Now, Bess," murmured the raccoon gentleman soothingly, "the osteopath that set your knee said not to get razzed—"

"Who wouldn't get razzed," broke in the high-colored lady indignantly, "over a poor little sweet mole like him losing the only car he's got, just because them million-dollar brakes of yours burned out on me? What's your name, deary?"

"Lamb," gulped the brush vendor—"N. Terwilliger Lamb."

"Lamb!" echoed the large couple, *duetto,* in amazement. "N. Terwilliger—why—say, any relation—"

"No," said N. Terwilliger sadly, shaking his aching head. "No relation of *the* N. Terwilliger Lamb—at least, no blood relation. My mother admired his achievements as a young man, and named me in the hope that—spiritually, I might—"

Here N. Terwilliger's voice sickened and died.

"Some namesake, young fella!" said the huge gentleman easily. "Some cliff for infant feet to climb!"

"Why, we're driving a Terwilliger Lamb landaulet ourselves," said the large lady. "We sank eight thousand berries in the body alone."

"The name," admitted N. Terwilliger, "frequently causes extreme surprise."

"Surprise!" echoed the large lady cheerfully. "It had me faded. For a minute I thought I'd horned in on the King o' Spain! Have ye finished your sandwich, deary?"

"I—I believe so," replied N. Terwilliger vaguely.

"Pay his check, papa," said the capable large lady. "We'll be outside lookin' at his car."

Outside, others were looking at his car—nurses with prams, high school girls in flapping arctics, small boys, matrons on their way to the movies—quite a little cluster stood about what had been N. Terwilliger's car. As the large lady pointed out, the brushes sticking out of the body reminded her for all the world of a hedgehog she had met last summer at Lake Louise.

"We're trotters, all right," she announced to an interested world. "We haven't slept in the same beds two nights running for months!"

The matrons edged nearer. The high school girls giggled. N. Terwilliger regarded his car. Bent, twisted, broken, utterly smashed, and behind it the landaulet, its splendor undimmed, arrogant, contemptuous, as superbly untouched by the futile wreck as a comet would be by a small parked cloud.

It was at the moment that N. Terwilliger was trying to open a jammed door that Mabelle Virginia McCann, free from her filing cabinet for an afternoon — Mabelle Virginia, blond and lustrous, wearing her new marmot coat and the strapped red Egyptian pumps—drew alongside and stopped.

"My gaudy necktie!" ejaculated Mabelle Virginia. "If it isn't Mr. Lamb!"

The matrons turned. The large lady turned. N. Terwilliger, trying to open the jammed door, stood for an instant as if struck by lightning before he also turned, looking considerably less pale than usual.

Not so long ago N. Terwilliger's conversational limit with Mabelle Virginia had been a shy "Er—good morning, Miss McCann. Er—well, is this cold enough for you?" But upon the third day of the second week, Mabelle Virginia, being two halves Irish, had rebelled.

"My gaudy necktie, Mr. Lamb!" she had said, exasperated. "Is it a clause in your contract with ma? Don't you know how to talk to a girl?"

"N-not to you," stammered N. Terwilliger, jammed by Mabelle Virginia's swoop into the very center of the truth.

"And why not to me? What's the matter with me?" she demanded, frowning across the table.

"N-nothing," said N. Terwilliger, gulping hot coffee. "That's the reason—"

"Here, pour in some milk. You're steaming like a locomotive. Take it easy. What's the reason?"

"When I start to talk to you—" began N. Terwilliger. "When I start—"

"Lay off the starter. Your engine's running."

"Something comes up in my throat and chokes me," gulped N. Terwilliger. "I think—it must be—my heart!"

For a long moment the girl's violet blue eyes met N. Terwilliger's pale ones across the checked tablecloth. At that moment Mabelle Virginia, who had always fancied dark gentlemen, whose favorite picture had been "The Sheik," and who had sworn never to ride permanently in anything less noteworthy than a Lamb landaulet, felt a perfectly normal pulse quicken curiously, and a glow that was not artificial spread across a cool cheek.

Elucidating to her girl friend afterward, Mabelle Virginia opined that it had been indigestion; but ever since that morning she had breakfasted late, and alone. It wasn't that she was really avoiding ma's Mr. Lamb, she told herself. It was only that the sight of his frayed but clean little collars and his suit of thin summer serge made her sick.

To-day, however, Mabelle stopped in spite of herself—stopped very short in her small red Egyptian tracks—stopped dead. Indeed, there is no proper term to express the suddenness, coupled with the finality, of her stopping.

"If it isn't Mr. Lamb!" said Mabelle Virginia once more, in an artificial little voice, while her eyes took in with one quick sweep the car, the large lady, the awakening, lifting, soaring look upon Mr. Lamb's face, and the whole situation.

"Friend of his, deary?" asked the large lady.

"Well, we're acquainted," admitted Mabelle Virginia. "Occasionally he cuts loose and mentions the weather."

"Oh, but now Miss McCann is being deliberately unkind!" said N. Terwilliger nervously. He raised his hat and replaced it. He pulled on a glove and pulled it off. "She quite understands me and my attempts at—at—but she prefers to appear perversely blind!"

"Perversely blind!" repeated Mabelle Virginia to the large lady. "Can you beat it? He attended night school in his youth, and now he holds down a sofa at Harvard!"

"I think he's sweet," said the large lady, belligerently; "and so do you, deary," she added.

Mabelle Virginia's blue eyes narrowed frostily, haughtily, for a moment. Then, at something in the large lady's expanding, embracing, understanding smile, they widened and warmed.

"Friend of his?" asked Mabelle Virginia, in her turn.

"For life!" said the large lady. "What d'ye know? When I smashed his little bus he apologized for leaving it lying about in my way!"

"He would," said Mabelle Virginia. "Can you beat it?"

"You can't even tie it," said the large lady.

It must have been from this moment that these two understood each other; for, immediately linking arms, they ignored Mr. Lamb and chattered. The large lady proved to be Mrs. James E. Sugden to newspapers, shops, and strangers, but Bess to the girls in the lodge at home and other intimate friends. She was as full of plans as an egg is of meat. When Mr. James E. Sugden appeared, she introduced him.

"Papa, meet Miss McCann. Isn't she pretty? Look at her shoes! I'm going to get me a pair like them, only green. Miss McCann, this is my Eddie's papa. He looked better with his mustache. Eddie's nineteen. You ought to hear him on the saxophone. He can make a noise like anything from a canary to a zebra. Say, folks, what are we waiting for? Get busy and get in. We're all going together to buy little old sweety here his little new car!"

So capable was the large lady, so generously, expansively smiling, so movingly forceful, so loud to listen to, so dazzling to look at, that N. Terwilliger, for one, was quite in a daze when, carrying his samples, he stepped into the landaulet. If anything had been needed to finish the work that the large lady had begun, Mabelle Virginia just next to him—Mabelle Virginia, blond and lustrous, leaning back quite at ease, her soft shoulder just brushing his own at the turns—

Well, N. Terwilliger, seated in the landaulet riding down Main Street, felt that even old N. Terwilliger himself, that huge dropsical sun hung high in the financial heavens, was a mere blinking penny rush-light in comparison. Old N. Terwilliger himself, for once, could have nothing on his humble namesake.

III

But the brush vendor's sensations, sailing down Main Street in the Lamb landaulet, were as nothing to his emotions as he rode home late after a dinner with the James E. Sugdens at the Alhambra—as he rode home late with his samples and Mabelle Virginia in his shining, gray-upholstered, new Fairy sedan.

The arc lights on the deserted corners hung frosty and blue. The streets ahead were long, dim lanes of white, cut by the black of the cleared car tracks into cubes on the stretches, into arabesques at the curves. Cars parked late before the picture palaces showed newly fallen snow on their roofs and running boards.

Outside N. Terwilliger's windows, the world ached and huddled and shivered away from the cold; but inside—ah! N. Terwilliger drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders. To outdo the young *Romeo!* To outshine the younger Barrymore! To fasten tin medals on the broad, heaving chests of the beautiful Rudies, the thrilling De Roches! To surpass all the great lovers of history! This was N. Terwilliger's reaction to the rising storm within.

The storm was fierce. It was violent. N. Terwilliger's thin frame trembled so beneath it that Mabelle Virginia, noticing, and thinking he must be cold, threw the new rug over his knees; and the tragedy of life for N. Terwilliger lay in the fact that he could not undeceive her. Cold, with this lamp in his breast? Cold, with this fire in his brain? Why, for the first time in his life N. Terwilliger was competing with a first-class, honest-to-goodness hero, storming the stars, riding the oceans of love, driving home with the girl, blond, lustrous, occasionally kind, whose little red Egyptian shoes, dancing across his heart, had left tracks thereon that would last forever!

Together they locked the shining new wonder away for the night in Mrs. McCann's old barn. Together they trod softly through the kitchen, and paused in the dimly lighted hall.

"In eight years and a half, Miss McCann," said N. Terwilliger deliberately, desperately, "I'm going to have an orange grove in California—and a wife," he added firmly, as an afterthought.

"My godfather, Mr. Lamb!" murmured Mabelle Virginia. "How sudden!"

"I've got four hundred and seventeen dollars toward it now," said N. Terwilliger earnestly, impressively. "All I need to swing it is two thousand. I wouldn't ask any girl to—to wait for eight years and a half, you understand. It wouldn't be fair to her; but I thought I'd just mention it."

"It pays to advertise," murmured Mabelle Virginia demurely.

"And if my dustless duster catches on," N. Terwilliger swept along recklessly, spurred by her eyelashes, by her sweetness, by her silence, into flights he had never dreamed of taking, "the time might be considerably shortened. I believe I've never shown you my dustless duster, Miss McCann?"

"No," said Mabelle Virginia.

"It looks like a gray muffler," exclaimed N. Terwilliger eagerly, unfolding an object from his breast pocket; "but it isn't a gray muffler. It smells like pine needles or eucalyptus; but, needless to say, it is neither. The smell is our secret, Miss McCann—big Charlie Hooley's and mine. The smell does the trick. The smell got us our patent. We have spent our evenings for six months, Miss McCann, evolving the dustless duster from the gray matter in our heads."

"That accounts for the foolish color," murmured Mabelle Virginia.

"Not at all!" said N. Terwilliger earnestly. "Our dustless dusters, boxed for market, can be made to match any room, any taste, any color scheme—"

"White for the brides," suggested Mabelle Virginia. "Black for the widows, and striped for the poor wives."

N. Terwilliger glanced up quickly, a hurt look in his pale eyes.

"I'm boring you," he said quietly.

He began to fold up the gray object slowly; but Mabelle Virginia laid a quick hand on his arm.

"Listen, Mr. Lamb," she said. "I've laughed over you, and I've cried over you, but from the day you came to the house, and there was that sly Tippie on the downy at the foot of your bed, and when Tippie scratched you, you said you sure liked cats and wasn't she beautiful—"

Mabelle Virginia paused, and drew a deeper breath than usual.

"You don't get bored, Mr. Lamb, by some one different from any one else in the world, by some one you don't know beforehand just what he'll say and do and think—just how he'll eat his orange, and whether he'll wipe his feet on the mat or track in mud for ma, and the kind of ties he'll wear, and the way he'll make love to you—for they all make love to you—"

Here N. Terwilliger's eyes came up to hers quickly, searchingly, and held her quiet for a moment.

"You've—you've never bored me, Mr. Lamb," she added after a moment—lamely enough, for Mabelle Virginia.

"Thank you, Miss McCann," said N. Terwilliger breathlessly. "I never hoped for as much!"

And then, because he was just N. Terwilliger, and not a beautiful Rudie or a thrilling De Roche, because he was shy and inarticulate and desperately in love, because he was so chivalrous that he couldn't dream of taking advantage of her occasional heavenly kindness, he shook hands with her gravely, stiffly, as he might have shaken hands with the minister, and wished her a hasty good night.

Mounting to his third floor room, N. Terwilliger waded through golden clouds. And Mabelle Virginia? Well, Mabelle Virginia eyed herself in the glass as she brushed out her hair. Blond, lustrous, quite beautiful in her kimono of scarlet silk, she measured herself carefully against her own very high standard, and was not dismayed.

Then her eyes dropped to a gray object on her dressing table, which N. Terwilliger, in his haste, had left in her hand. It was the dustless duster, and even in the flatness of that moment she smiled a little.

"Striped for the poor wives!" she thought, as she drifted off to sleep. "Dusting, washing dishes, mopping, kissing the kids when they bark their dirty little knees, painting the porch furniture, fighting the bills, wearing a boudoir cap to market, forgetting your complexion and your hands and your teeth and your brains, too tired to eat or laugh or love — my grandfather's clock, strike out! Good night, nurse! They can head my obituary 'Mabelle McCann, the Filing Cabinet's Bride!'"

IV

Mabelle Virginia was leaning over a newspaper spread upon the scrubbed table as N. Terwilliger came through the kitchen next evening. When N. Terwilliger, rubbing his numbed hands together, sat down near the sink to remove his wet galoshes, she looked at him for a brief moment in silence.

"You're in the evening paper," she announced at length. "You're spread across a whole page like a sunset."

"Oh, that will be the other Terwilliger Lamb," said N. Terwilliger easily, busy at his unbuckling. "He's said to spend three millions a year in advertising. It's—it's great," the little man added humbly, "to have the same name as a celebrity like that, to come even a little under the shadow of his mantle. It's—it's an incentive to a chap to be named after a colossal success like that. And he's a fine man, too. He gave fifty thousand dollars, a while ago, to find a cure for hay fever."

"A friend of mine," said Mabelle Virginia steadily, "who worked in his Newark branch, said the old man was a first-class grouch. My friend said he could freeze the most liquid sales manager to a perfect solid just by walking into his office. My friend said that for the glad hand the old man didn't have, he was the humming bird's breeches!"

"Indeed!" said N. Terwilliger mildly. "That's odd! I can hardly credit that. He was so kind to my mother."

"How do you mean, kind?"

"Well, he sent her a fine letter when she wrote that she had named the baby after him—I," explained N. Terwilliger unnecessarily, "being the baby. He said he appreciated the compliment."

"Did he send along a silver mug or anything engraved 'Welcome, little Lamb'?" asked Mabelle Virginia. "Did he make a noise like a check?"

"No," said N. Terwilliger. "No, he didn't do that. Why should he? But it was a very fine letter. I have it in my trunk upstairs."

"Great snakes, Mr. Lamb!" ejaculated Mabelle Virginia in exasperation. "Haven't you got any fight in you?"

"Fight, Miss McCann? Why do you wish me to fight? What is there to fight?"

"Life," said Mabelle Virginia cryptically. "Come over here!"

N. Terwilliger, dazed but obedient, unwound his knitted muffler, got up from his chair, and came. Together they bent over the newspaper spread across Mrs. McCann's kitchen table. Together they read the advertisement which shrieked up at them in huge colored letters, covering the newspaper page like a sunset indeed:

N. TERWILLIGER LAMB TAKES THE BUMPS IN A FAIRY SEDAN

And then, in small type, in one corner:

Fairy Automobile Company, South Main Street

The smart young Fairy salesman and the smarter young Fairy advertising man, putting their heads together to make a killing, had had the art and the acumen to shoot straight enough for a bull's-eye, and then had put four satisfied feet up on the same desk and called it a day.

When N. Terwilliger finally raised his head to look at Mabelle Virginia, he was quite pale.

"It's me!" he said breathlessly. "It isn't the famous N. Terwilliger Lamb at all—it's me!"

"It's you, all right," agreed Mabelle Virginia, watching him with a flinty eye.

"But, Miss McCann," said N. Terwilliger in great distress, "this is terrible! It's taking advantage. It's using another man's name!"

"It's using your name," said Mabelle Virginia flintily.

"Oh, yes, of course; but don't you see"—N. Terwilliger threw out his hands—"it's sailing under false colors. It's deceiving the public into thinking that the other Terwilliger Lamb—the real Terwilliger Lamb—"

"It's a darned smart ad," said Mabelle Virginia watchfully. "And it's quite legal."

"Legal!" cried N. Terwilliger. "Who cares whether it's legal? It's not ethical, I tell you. It's not—honest. It's something I can't lie down under, Miss McCann. I'd as soon steal another man's sandwich as his name!"

"You keep forgetting it's your name," said Mabelle Virginia patiently. "You're not getting anything out of it."

"I'm going to get something out of it," said N. Terwilliger suddenly, somberly, "before the evening's over!"

"What?" asked Mabelle Virginia.

"Satisfaction," said N. Terwilliger thirstily; and, striking himself upon his narrow chest, he added: "Rehabilitation."

Secretly N. Terwilliger was romantic, but he had never dared; and now something fair and shining, which had been prisoned within him, burst its bonds in the surge of Mabelle Virginia's inspiration, beneath Mabelle Virginia's eyes. N. Terwilliger, for the moment, was transformed.

He wound his muffler about his delicate throat, and, walking over to the chair beside the sink, began to put on his galoshes.

"Without your dinner?" asked Mabelle Virginia.

"What's dinner?" said N. Terwilliger with a reckless air.

Quite transformed! If Tippie had rolled up in the red chair as Tippie, and had unrolled as a striped tigress, Mabelle Virginia could not have been more astonished. There was purpose to the way he buckled his galoshes. There was pep to his stamping about in them after they were buckled. There was an air to the way he swung into his old overcoat. When he put on his hat, it had a cock to it.

"Wait!" said Mabelle Virginia, without conscious volition of her own. "I'm coming along; but where—who—what are you going to fight, Mr. Lamb?"

"Life!" said N. Terwilliger.

As he went out, he slammed the door behind him.

V

The Fairy salesroom on South Main Street was closed when they drew up before its plate glass expanse, but a light was still shining in a rear office, and presently, in answer to N. Terwilliger's persistent knocking, a head with a cigarette protruding from a corner of its mouth appeared around a rear door. And as N. Terwilliger continued to knock, to pound, to gesticulate through the glass, the owner of the head steered a leisurely course across the tiled floor and opened the door.

"What's the idea, Paul Revere?" said the owner of the head. "Have the British marched?"

"I'm N. Terwilliger Lamb. You've exploited me in your beastly ad!" panted N. Terwilliger, unfastening his coat with trembling fingers, unwinding his muffler. "You've used my name to deceive the public. You've tried to pass me off as the real Terwilliger Lamb. I'm not the real Terwilliger Lamb!" panted N. Terwilliger, taking off the hat which had had a cock to it, and tossing it into a corner. "I resent being placed in the false, in the dishonest position of seeming to be what I'm not. What," demanded N. Terwilliger, "would the real Terwilliger Lamb think if he came to hear of it?"

"What, indeed?" said the owner of the head blandly. Then, grinning over his shoulder toward the rear office, he called: "Say, boys, come out and see the only bird in captivity who objects to free advertising! He's here with his keeper!"

Still grinning broadly, he turned back, to consider N. Terwilliger amiably once more.

At that instant N. Terwilliger's arm shot out, and N. Terwilliger's fist caught the owner of the head at a particularly sensitive point upon his undefended jaw. Through the little mêlée that followed, the owner of the head rested quietly upon the tiled floor, stretched full length beside a shining new gray-upholstered Fairy sedan.

Two other surprised young men, issuing at a run from the rear office, immediately engaged N. Terwilliger. After one of them had received a cut on his lip, and the other a wild punch in the left eye from N. Terwilliger, and after both young men had taken considerable punishment in the way of kicks and bumps and jerks from a suddenly fired and frenzied Mabelle Virginia, N. Terwilliger, too, was stretched prone upon the immaculate tiling, and the little party stopped to breathe and consider the situation.

The first young man, owner of the head, who was the Fairy local sales manager, was all for the police when he sat up and joined them. It was evident that the first young man was seriously annoyed.

"He gets a new car given him by a perfect stranger, and a whale of an ad on a silver salver, and he howls for blood," complained the owner of the head, which was aching badly. "He's the kind of a guy that would poison a blind beggar's dog. He'd stage a steeplechase on a department store escalator. He'd set fire to an aquarium. He's a mischievous lad—that's what he is!"

"He's crazy," said the second young man, who was the Fairy local advertising manager.

"He's worse—he's honest," said the third young man.

Jeers met this announcement, but the third young man, who happened to be the local representative of a big New York daily, held up an impressive hand.

"Tarry a while," said he. "Use brakes and brains. We may get kudos out of this. We'll ship him east of Suez in charge of Miss Dempsey here, and then we'll dope out a front page spread for the morning edition that will beat any ad. Moreover, it 'll happen to be true. 'N. Terwilliger Lamb Wrecks Fairy Salesroom and Breaks Collar Bone.' Zowie! That story 'll scream like an eagle. Now, Miss Dempsey, if you please!"

"McCann," corrected Mabelle Virginia distinctly.

"My mistake," said the third young man. "Take his head, Bob, and I'll manage the galoshes. Limp, ain't he? Can you run a Fairy, Miss Dempsey?"

"McCann," said Mabelle Virginia. "I can run anything."

"I'll say, sister," agreed the third young man. "I'll say. Prop him up with the rug, Bob, and bring his hat. Not a cop stirring! In you go, Miss Dempsey. Say, buy a New York *Record* in the morning. You will figure as 'the beautiful blonde.' My admiration, Miss Dempsey, though controlled, is keen!"

"McCann," said Mabelle Virginia. "Your eye, Mr. Whoosiz, though keen, is not controlled. It's got a puff over it like a tea cozy; and the other gent's lip 'll have to be explained to his wife. I certainly feel sorry for any three bruisers that try to pick on Mr. Lamb!"

"Our shins, Miss Dempsey, register your sorrow. Now, all set, Gladys? Comfortable? Warm? Happy? On your way, then, sweetness!"

VI

AND so it happened that upon three succeeding mornings Leonidas Pulsifer, secretary in chief to *the* N. Terwilliger Lamb, laid upon his chief's mahogany writing table, in direct line with his chief's vision, a newspaper which the old man was not in the habit of reading.

It may be stated here that old N. Terwilliger's first requisite from each unit in his trio of secretaries was an absence of noise—the ability to move into and about and out of his room delicately, the ability to take orders and execute them without words, the ability to sit without jiggling and to say nothing. Beyond efficiency, before ability, above address or appearance or brains or an English accent, old N. Terwilliger demanded the quiet about him which approaches peace.

"I have a weak stomach and large, sensitive ears," old N. Terwilliger once explained in a moment of expansion, after a particularly thundering deal to Leonidas Pulsifer. " Perhaps you've noticed them."

Pulsifer, by a bow, signified that the ears, like everything else about N. Terwilliger, were noteworthy.

" This is the age of jangle and yap," continued old N. Terwilliger. " It's the age of grab, holler, and git. The less I hear of it, the better. It's the age of get your feet in the other fellow's trough, and shout to the stars that you've done him at last. The less I see of it, the better. I dislike the human race. I dislike hogs. The fewer people I see, the fewer hogs I see, the better."

Pulsifer, suppressing a polite shudder, murmured that it was strongly put.

" You're a saphead, Pulsifer," said old N. Terwilliger brutally; " but you're honest—at least, you're measurably honest. I don't say you wouldn't sell me out for a hundred thousand. That would be about your price, Pulsifer. Money'll buy anybody and anything in this world but health and happiness. Now get out, Pulsifer, and don't wear that waistcoat again in my office. It makes my ears ache."

So Pulsifer, with his three newspapers upon his three successive mornings, laid them before the old man in silence.

The first morning the old man grinned.

" Me in a Fairy sedan?" said he. " I'd sooner be seen in a hearse, Pulsifer. Why can't the Fairy crowd let me rest in peace?"

Upon the second morning the old man grunted.

" The New York *Record,* Pulsifer—that yellow rag?" he said mildly, running his eye over the headlines. " ' N. Terwilliger Lamb Wrecks—' Say, did I wreck a Jersey salesroom and break my collar bone with a beautiful blonde last night, Pulsifer? I thought I was at home, with my feet in a mustard bath. Don't waste my time with any more *Records,* Pulsifer. They make my ears ache."

Upon the third morning, the old man sat before Pulsifer's third newspaper a long time in frowning silence, for it was a newspaper which even old N. Terwilliger was bound to respect. A sob sister from the respectable newspaper had visited Mrs. McCann's; and the sob sister's article was headed, " N. Terwilliger Lamb, Idealist."

" Hell, Pulsifer!" said old N. Terwilliger, at last. " This chap is either a crook or a genius at advertising. The thing had better be stopped. Phone Mr. Janes to be here at five. We're driving to Jersey."

And so it happened that when Mabelle Virginia let herself in with her latchkey at six that evening, and walked into the deserted parlor, the parlor was not deserted, for Tippie, somnolent, occupied the red armchair and an old gentleman, alert, occupied the green one. Mabelle Virginia took in the rocky, protruding chin, the beetling promontory of a nose, the little eyes like warning signals that squinted and gleamed beneath twin bushes of gray eyebrow. Mabelle Virginia noted the large, significant ears, as she drew off her white woolen gloves.

" Good evening, Mr. Lamb," she said, throwing her gloves on the golden oak table.

" Good evening, Miss McCann," said old N. Terwilliger.

Mabelle Virginia dropped her new marmot coat on the sofa and pulled off her close little hat. Then she lifted Tippie, somnolent, from the red armchair, sat down in it herself, and settled Tippie upon her lap. Throughout the little conversation that followed, Mabelle Virginia stroked Tippie softly, and the old gentleman watched Mabelle Virginia.

It was old N. Terwilliger's invariable policy to let the other fellow begin, especially if the other fellow happened to be a woman. So, after a little pause, Mabelle Virginia spoke.

" Are you waiting to see N. Terwilliger?" she asked politely.

" No—I have been waiting to see you," said the old gentleman. " First," he added.

She glanced up quickly, and then glanced down, stroking Tippie softly, evenly.

" Well, go ahead," she said presently. " This is your move."

" Very well, Miss McCann, I move," said old N. Terwilliger. " What's the game? The readers of two newspapers are led to believe that I ride about in a tin car and wreck automobile salesmen. The readers of a third newspaper are led to believe that I'm an ogre who turns a deserving young relative out into the snow. Now you know and I know that I have no deserving young relative. What's the game?"

Mabelle Virginia stroked Tippie softly.

" It's not a game at all," she said thoughtfully, " unless you call being kind and unselfish and honorable a game."

" I call being those things a very deep

game indeed, Miss McCann," said old N. Terwilliger.

"That's hard on you," said Mabelle Virginia, "if you see things on a slant like that, if you see life crooked and out of proportion. If you squint and peer and sniff at folks like that, Mr. Lamb, I'm afraid you won't get N. Terwilliger at all. It took me some time to get him myself, Mr. Lamb, and I'm not so fed up with nervous prosperity that I've got mental indigestion—like you have," added Mabelle Virginia.

The old gentleman said nothing. His little red eyes winked and gleamed, but he said nothing. It was his invariable policy to let the other fellow, once well started, proceed without interruption, especially if the other fellow happened to be a woman.

"You see it happened like this, Mr. Lamb," continued Mabelle Virginia presently. "You've heard of links in a chain, each one depending on the other, each one following the other. Well, this chain started twenty-three years ago, Mr. Lamb, when a poor woman who never had any chiffon stockings or embroidered sheets or theater tickets or American Beauties, who never even had enough coal or oatmeal or real butter on her bread, a woman who had a sick husband that died and a sick baby that lived—well, this woman named her sick baby after you, thinking—"

"Thinking she might get money. An old dodge!" snapped N. Terwilliger.

"Perhaps," said Mabelle Virginia. "Who knows? Hoping a little, maybe. Who wouldn't? 'Here's a man who's come down from the Lambs of old Kent, like the boy here,' she thought; 'a man that's got everything in the world I want the boy to have, that's got it by himself by brains and push and straight dealing, like I want the boy to do.' So she cut your picture out of a magazine, Mr. Lamb, and hung it on the wall; and you wrote her a letter 'appreciating the compliment.'"

Mabelle Virginia paused, stroking Tippie softly, evenly, between the cat's somnolent ears.

"After a while the woman died, and the boy went into a home, and came out of the home; but here's the point, Mr. Lamb—there was something in that boy that couldn't be killed, even by the home. I ain't very good at long words, but I guess we can call it faith—faith in the old things—unselfishness, truth, honesty."

Once more she paused, swallowing away a little dryness in her throat, stroking Tippie softly.

"He got a job selling brushes, and he made good," continued Mabelle Virginia, after a moment. "He came to live with us, and he made good with ma and Tippie here. And after a long time"—Mabelle Virginia hesitated—"after a long time he made good with—with me, Mr. Lamb. There's something about him that makes you want to feed him, Mr. Lamb, that makes you want to—give him things. Some nice roughnecks busted his little boat, and they give him a new one, and a dinner at the Alhambra afterward. Then the Fairy people saw a chance to be smart, and to sell the public into thinking it was you, or at least into getting people to read the ad and grin; and N. Terwilliger went off his nut and plowed down there and fought the bunch—protecting your name, Mr. Lamb, from himself. And so they used him again in the *Record*. And a woman reporter got to him when I was away—he didn't really break his collar bone, but he had to lay off a couple of days—and he showed her your letter, the one he keeps so careful in his trunk upstairs, Mr. Lamb—the one 'appreciating the compliment'—and she printed it."

Her hand dropped down hard upon Tippie's soft back. Tippie stirred, opening one somnolent eye.

"But the whole point is, Mr. Lamb, that he showed her the letter because he's so proud of it, coming from you. He never felt any—lack in it. He admires you, Mr. Lamb, more than anybody. He keeps on telling how fine you are. He's got his faith in folks built on you, Mr. Lamb, like a sort of corner stone, like a sort of flag."

Here Mabelle Virginia, feeling in one of her blue serge pockets, brought forth a gray object, with which she dabbed at her eyes. Mabelle Virginia wasn't crying, you understand, but her eyes were wet.

"And I just can't bear it, Mr. Lamb, if you let him down when you meet him. I suppose you came out here to arrest us both, or something. I saw the sheriff in your car outside. If you do that, Mr. Lamb, you'll kill him as sure as if you had turned him out into the snow, like that reporter said. He couldn't stand it, Mr. Lamb—the disgrace would kill him. He's got a delicate throat. He's—saving up—for—California—"

Mabelle Virginia, trembling, stooping, buried her wet face in Tippie's soft back, and for a space there was silence in Mrs. McCann's parlor.

It was during this silence that N. Terwilliger burst in from the kitchen.

"Mabelle Virginia!" N. Terwilliger was calling excitedly, as he came through the hall. "Mabelle Virginia, your mother says Mr. Lamb's here! Your mother says Mr. Lamb—Mr. Lamb—"

Even though he was thus prepared, N. Terwilliger's voice died quite away at the sight of the old gentleman sitting in the green armchair; but there was an awakening, lifting, soaring look upon his face as he crossed the room and held out his hand.

"This gives me the greatest pleasure, sir," he managed jerkily, "the greatest pleasure—so far—of my life!"

The old gentleman regarded the outstretched hand, squinted up under his shaggy brows at the eager young face, and squinted across at Mabelle Virginia. Then the old gentleman did a curious thing. He got up from the green armchair, and, looking straight at N. Terwilliger, he raised his hand in a little gesture of salute.

"My boy," he said gallantly, "the pleasure is belated, but mutual. It's time I met any deserving young namesake of mine who happens to be lying around loose. What say," added old N. Terwilliger, "what say to chucking Lawyer Janes and the car and the chauf out there, and us three getting into your Fairy and driving down for a little dinner at the Alhambra—us three? What say?"

VII

The arc lights on the deserted corners hung frosty and blue. The streets ahead were long, dim lanes of white cut by the black of the cleared car tracks into cubes on the stretches, into arabesques at the curves. Cars parked late before the picture palaces showed newly fallen snow on their roofs and running boards. Outside N. Terwilliger's windows the world ached and huddled and shivered away from the cold, but inside—ah!

N. Terwilliger drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders. As he moved, Mabelle Virginia lifted her head.

"Rose-colored for the happy wives," said Mabelle Virginia. "There's something in luck. He wouldn't have seen our duster at all, hon, if I hadn't cried into it. Think of our dusters, hon, being good enough for the Terwilliger Lamb cars! But there was a whole lot more than dumb luck made him give you their advertising for southern California."

N. Terwilliger, driving with one hand on the wheel, looking ahead with one eye on the road, put his other hand under Mabelle Virginia's round chin and lifted her lips to his.

"What more, darling Mabelle Virginia?" asked N. Terwilliger.

"You!" said Mabelle Virginia.

THE SUNDIAL

Time in a garden,
Just around the corner,
  Right around the corner of the world.
Summer on the *patio;*
Mignonette and golden-glow,
And quiet, like a cameo.

Time in a garden!
Baby feet are running,
  Baby fingers cover up the leaves;
Where the jasmine vines are veiling,
Where the yellow rose is trailing,
Love is lord and all-prevailing!

You who ride on the busy street,
Is life more laughing or youth more sweet
  Than sunlight in a garden,
  Just around the corner,
Right around the corner of the world?

Mary Louise Mabie

Collaborators

A NOVELIST AND HIS WIFE EVOLVE A HERO AND A HEROINE, WITH UNEXPECTED RESULTS

By Edward M. Thierry

MATTHEW OGG'S new wife shot him a peevish look. The domestic barometer registered an immediate forecast of "cloudy and warmer." An early morning spat was following hard upon the breakfast eggs, and it looked like a long, hot, hostile day.

Time was when Mrs. Ogg, becoming annoyed with the obstinate Ogg, resolutely bridled her tongue, and didn't even dream of casting him an angry glance; but that was when she was plain Sophie Mead, spinster secretary to Matthew Ogg, popular novelist. Then she spoke softly, if at all. She kept her nimble fingers dancing over the typewriter keys, and her thoughts over the vista of what she could do and would do to put a little vim and vigor into the best-seller at the moment under incubation—if her employer would let her.

When Miss Mead was hot under the collar, she always concealed it. She was getting on—thirty-five, confidentially. She had the wisdom of years. In her typewriting days, she wisely stuck strictly to the job of typewriting. She did not obtrude herself. She just let herself grow on the middle-aged author, like the slow, unnoticed growth of a habit—a sort of automatic insinuation of personality which, after some years, had its reward. She was indispensable.

So Sophie Mead, secretary, had become Mrs. Ogg, wife. Her new life had begun two months ago.

Her station now even transcended that of wife. Years of dreaming over the typewriter, when Ogg wrestled with a balky plot and slowed up in dictation, were at last to bear fruit. She had been promoted from secretary to wife, from amanuensis to collaborator.

Ogg, in a weak moment of his courtship, during which time he unromantically talked shop, had promised that his dear Sophie should join with him in writing his next novel.

"My dear," he had said, "you have helped me so wonderfully in your sweet, quiet way. You have guided me over many a pitfall with a common-sense suggestion. We will collaborate!"

"Oh, Matthew! My dream's come true!"

In a sketchy, conversational way they had planned the next novel. It was to be a typical Ogg romance—the kind that chained thousands of thrilled women to easy chairs all afternoon, increased the home consumption of chocolates, and made the author rich. Under the title was to be the glittering legend:

BY MATTHEW AND SOPHIE OGG

That Ogg subsequently forgot this pact was perhaps due to the unaccustomed inebriation of wooing, for he had always confined himself to writing about other people's love affairs, and had never had one himself. Then there was the unprecedented interruption of the wedding and the honeymoon trip to the seashore, where he was kept busy spending a part of last year's royalties.

Mrs. Ogg hadn't forgotten. Whenever she was alone, she revised and refurbished sketches of her characters, practiced upon bits of dialogue, and prepared generally for the time when they would return to the comfortable Ogg study—the literary workshop where they had labored and loved—and there begin assembling notes and breathing a strong twin life into the Ogg family's great novel.

Sophie was now known as "Matthew Ogg's wife." She yearned to forge ahead on a fleet literary steed to a point where the public would give deserved recognition to her genius. Some day, she fully expected, she would be world famous, and Matthew would be referred to as "Mrs. Ogg's husband."

That was her goal; and here, right in the midst of their first breakfast at home, with a day of delightful collaboration ahead of them, they had quarreled over the family novel!

Ogg, looking up from his poached egg, exhibited amazement when his bride began talking of "our novel." The possessive pronoun jarred him. He stared at her as she rattled on about characters and plot and dénouement.

"Really, my dear, you can't be serious about wanting to help write the story?"

That was his first unfortunate remark. It was as if he had pressed a button. The lid of her temper flew off instantly. It was more than an angry look Mrs. Ogg shot him. There was fight in her eye.

"Matthew!" Her tone was icy. "Do you forget your promise—our plans for the book?"

Ogg, jolted back to earth, remorsefully recalled his weakness. He wanted to struggle, but already his bride had produced a neat sheaf of notes, nicely caught together at the top. No, not with a businesslike paper clip—with ribbon!

He groaned, and accepted the ribboned sheets to read. Ogg was getting his first lesson in domestic docility.

He had started very badly. He knew it; for, as he read, he stole a look over his glasses and saw his wife sitting very straight and looking very cold and determined. She was waiting, no doubt, to pounce upon him and verbally tear him to pieces at his first word of criticism.

Though a novelist, Ogg did not lack courage. When he had glanced through the notes, he leisurely got up, strolled toward the study door, and then stopped and looked at Mrs. Ogg.

She had risen, too.

"Well?" she said.

It was only natural, when he replied, that his tone should sound a bit superior. In a gently admonishing way he said:

"Really, my dear, we must not be ridiculous. I fear your heroine is too—er—anæmic."

Mrs. Ogg was left gasping.

"She isn't! Right off you find fault—you, who probably haven't given a thought to a plot or a character!"

"Oh, yes, I have. I've got it all planned—notes in my desk. Really, if you want to help, all right; but we must be sane. Take my hero, *Basil Mainwaring*. He's a real red-blooded, two-fisted, masculine person. How can I blend into his vigorous characterization the bloodless heroine you have created?"

Ogg paused, as if to let his pronouncement sink into an inferior intellect.

"Why," he went on, "her very name is enough to spoil the whole thing. *Gwendolyn!* What an appalling name! It belongs to the Bertha M. Clay age of near-literature. Trashy! Undignified! It isn't being done any more, you know."

Ogg tapped the rolled sheets of Mrs. Ogg's notes against the palm of his hand and pushed through the study door in graceful retreat.

Rage and mortification tied Mrs. Ogg's tongue, but did not paralyze her feet. She hurried after her husband, and faced him across the wide flat-topped desk as he sat down in his workroom. He took a tablet from a drawer and put it before him on the desk, beside the ribboned notes.

"Just to show you that I have made some notes," he explained. Looking up at her, he went on, placidly judicial: "*Gwendolyn* will never do. Plain names are the thing, like *Mary* or *Ida Jane* or *Sarah Ann*—"

The volcano erupted. Wrath and sarcasm chased each other up and down the scale in Mrs. Ogg's tone:

"*Sarah*, fiddlesticks! She's *my* heroine. I know what I want to call her. She's *Gwendolyn!* I created her, didn't I? I'm going to name her. Common names, indeed! Why don't you practice what you preach? *Basil Mainwaring!* What a mollycoddle name! Better change it to *John Henry Jones*."

"Really, my dear—"

"Don't you d-dear me!" exclaimed the bride, forecasting showers.

She leaned against the desk and dabbed at her eyes. Matthew Ogg looked annoyed. Anger mastered the lady's threatened tears, however.

"You act as if I didn't know a thing about writing a novel! Haven't I slaved at your typewriter for three years? Can you run a typewriter? No, you can't! Where would you have been, I'd like to know, without me to do the *real* work? A literary failure—that's what!"

"There, there, my dear—"

"Don't talk to me, Matthew Ogg! You're a cheat—a literary pirate! Your promises are like your books—empty! I was to be your collaborator. What a joke! I wouldn't get you out of the literary swamp you're in if you were up to your ears and begged me for help! I'm through!"

She reached over to snatch up his tablet and her ribboned notes. The former she sailed viciously into the air. It hit the wall in the corner and fell with a thud behind a davenport.

"*That* for your *Basil* hero!"

Ogg jumped up. Ignoring him, Sophie regarded her own neat sheaf of notes for a tender moment, and then flung the thing over her shoulder. Papers rattled, and little tails of ribbon fluttered in the air. The sheaf bounced off the wall and dropped behind the bookcase in the opposite corner of the room.

"And *that* for my *Gwendolyn*—brought into the world to suffer your sneers!"

Very tragic she was as she stalked to the door, where she turned and delivered a parting shot.

"You and your old novel can go to the devil!"

II

The door shut with a bang. Ogg still stood staring. Then he fell back limply into his chair. He hadn't had a shock like that in years. Finally he found his tongue.

"Well, I'm damned!"

There was silence for a full minute.

"So am I," suddenly said a muffled feminine voice. "Ain't mother got the wicked tongue?"

Ogg sat up straight, as if he had been jabbed with a pin. Puzzled astonishment and a bit of fright showed in his face.

He nearly fell out of his chair as he saw a girl's head rise over the top of the low bookcase. She was pretty, bobbed-haired, fair, and laughing.

"Hello, Arnold Bennett!" she said breezily.

"He-hello!" he stuttered. Between a gasp and a gape he finished lamely: "I'm not Arnold Bennett, though."

The girl giggled.

"Oh, all right! Don't apologize. Who are you?"

"I'm Matthew Ogg, the novelist." He got up and bowed slightly. "But who are you, and what are you doing hiding behind my bookcase?"

"I'm not hiding. You can see me, can't you?"

"Well, what are you doing there?" inquired Ogg.

"I'm waiting for you to let me out. A gentleman would do that for a lady. I can't move the damned thing. It's too heavy."

"Oh, surely," said Ogg. He moved over and began tugging at the bookcase. "But you mustn't use such language," he went on. "Ladies do not swear."

"They don't, eh? Wait! Ah, fine—now I can get out!"

She squeezed from behind the bookcase, smiled at her rescuer, and calmly walked over and boosted herself to a seat on the top of Ogg's desk.

"Ladies don't swear?" she continued. "Where do you get that stuff? Didn't you hear mother tell you and your old novel to go to the devil?"

Ogg started, and walked up to the desk.

"Mother? You said that before. Whom do you mean by 'mother'?"

"Why, the dame that cussed you out and slammed the door on you."

"Young lady," said Ogg severely, "that was my wife!"

"Your wife? Gosh, she must love her husband!" The girl clapped her hands. "Oh, say! That makes you my papa, doesn't it?"

The startled novelist blushed.

"My *dear* young lady! Why—"

"No, I guess I'm wrong," she interrupted. "I ain't got no father. I'm fifty per cent orphan."

"How ridiculous! But I must say your language is extremely bad. Didn't you learn grammar in school?"

"I've never been at school."

"What, at your age? How old are you?"

"About five minutes, I should judge. I was born behind the bookcase."

Ogg reeled. He grabbed at a chair for support.

"Great Heavens!" he breathed.

"Was rather sudden, wasn't it?" the girl smiled. "Say, mother's got a strong arm, hasn't she? She can throw like the dickens. Was her father in the American or the National League?"

"Don't be silly," said the muddled Ogg rudely. "Now, tell me what you mean by all this gabble about mother. What is your name?"

"My name? Gosh, I thought you knew! You must be thick-headed—and a novelist, too! My goodness! Why, I'm Gwendolyn."

Ogg's knees gave out. He collapsed into the chair, wondering vaguely if he was going mad. His eyes popped as he gazed up at the grinning girl on the desk. He thought of getting up and pinching her, to see if she was real; but he felt too weak to move.

"Well, I'm damned!" he muttered.

"Don't get so tragic," said Gwendolyn. "This is supposed to be a light and joyful affair."

"What is?"

"Why, this book I'm in—the novel you and mother were writing till she got mad and gave you a savage walkout."

Ogg snapped out of his limpness and regarded the girl sternly.

"Now see here, young lady, don't try to tell me such nonsense! It's absurd for you to sit there, a living, breathing human being, and inform a person of my intelligence that you are a character in a novel come to life. Utter absurdity!"

"It's not absurd. I can't help it. I didn't ask to be born behind your old bookcase. I just happened. That artist's model, *Galatea,* couldn't help it, could she, when she popped to life? I suppose I'm a *Galatea* of fiction. Romantic, don't you think?"

The novelist jumped up and began striding up and down the room. He ran his fingers through his hair and scowled.

"What a day! What a day! Either I'm crazy or I'm dreaming!"

Gwendolyn looked sympathetic.

"Poor old papa!" she said.

"Papa! Bah! Quit that!"

"Well, you're my foster papa, ain't you?"

"Confound it!" exclaimed Ogg testily. "Don't say 'ain't'!"

"Oh, all right! But you are my foster papa. You're my mother's husband. I'll have to read mother's manuscript, to find out who my real parents are in the book. Gosh, I hope they're rich!"

The girl slid off the table and ran over to the bookcase. She began poking behind it, and got several wrinkled pages of notes. One, with ribbon hanging to the top, was badly torn. She held it up.

"See, papa, that must be the page I came out of. Here at the top it says '*Gwendolyn*' in capital letters. Isn't that a pretty name?"

"Ghastly!" said Ogg, subsiding gloomily upon the davenport.

Gwendolyn opened her mouth to retort—and closed it. An unexpected interruption came. It was a very definite groan. The girl jumped, and the man started.

"What's that?" exclaimed Gwendolyn.

"How do I know?" said Ogg sulkily. "Nothing would surprise me now. Maybe it was your manuscript grandfather groaning in his grave."

"Horrid thing! I don't blame mother for cussing you. I'm sure I heard a groan." She did, for at that moment it sounded again. "There it goes the second time. Sounds as if it comes from your corner."

She ran over. Ogg jumped up. The girl knelt on the davenport and looked over the back of it. She gave a little scream.

"Oh-h-h! The poor thing! Look, Papa Ogg—it's a *man!*"

The harried novelist, now properly agitated, took a look.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said.

"Is that all you can say? You've said the same thing four times. You talk like a one-cylinder parrot." Gwendolyn gave him a push. "Why don't you do something, instead of standing there like a ninny damning yourself? Pull out the davenport, Papa Ogg!"

III

THUS spurred, Ogg functioned obediently. The two went behind the davenport and dragged out the figure of a man, apparently unconscious. He was young, dark-haired, and good-looking, and wore good clothes.

Ogg laid him on the davenport. The girl knelt down and bent over the sleeper. She stroked his forehead, while Ogg looked on, scowling.

"Ain't he—I mean aren't he—the handsome thing? Poor, dear boy! Where does it hurt you, you sweet thing—groaning and everything all alone behind the old sofa?"

Ogg grimaced.

"What silly rot! Talk sense! Maybe you're mad, though. I must be. My study is a madhouse. Girl behind the bookcase —man behind the davenport! Probably snakes in my desk—and bats in my head!" He strode to the desk and got a glass of water. "Here, dash this over his manly beauty, and he'll probably come to life."

The girl took the water, and, pouring some into the palm of her hand, began gently to bathe the stranger's temples. It worked. The man stirred.

"Oh, look!" cried Gwendolyn. "He's waking up."

"Where am I?" said a weak voice.

"Maybe he's a male *Galatea*," suggested Ogg. "Anyway, he runs true to form. All unconscious persons say the same thing when they come to—'Where am I?'"

"I know they do—in your novels!" Having delivered this shot, Gwendolyn turned sympathetically to her patient. "You're all right. You're safe among friends—one, anyway."

That seemed to reassure the youth. He sat up, looked around, and grinned.

"My word! I must have had a jolly hard knock. Hello! Who's the charming nurse?"

Gwendolyn got to her feet and smiled.

"I'm not a nurse. I'm Gwendolyn."

"Greetings, Miss Gwendolyn! Delighted, I'm sure!" He looked at the novelist, who stood regarding him with hostile mien. "Who's the elderly tragedian?"

Ogg glared.

"Young man, don't be so flippant," he said gruffly. "Please explain yourself. What were you doing behind my sofa—sleeping off a jag? How did you get into my house? Who are you? What do you want? Be quick—be quick!"

"Cease firing! One at a time, please! I don't know how I got behind your sofa. I didn't even know it was your sofa. I wasn't tight, worse luck! Search me how I got into your house!"

Ogg started to interrupt. The youth held up a hand.

"Wait! I'm not through answering your questions. Let me see, where was I? Oh, yes—my name. Well, I'm Basil Mainwaring."

The novelist started, and looked as if he were going to have a fit.

"Yes, that's it," the youth said, grinning. "It's a devilish name, but I'm not responsible for that, am I? The last I remember, I was a character in a novel. The old codger who created me got into a fight with his wife, and she began throwing things. After that everything's blank."

Ogg gave a despairing moan.

"Suffering snakes! A fine pair you two are!" He pointed a shaking finger at Gwendolyn. "That's what she said—she came out of a novel, too!"

A cackling laugh escaped him. Like a tortured soul he began charging up and down the room.

"Lunatics!" he raged. "You both talk silly rot! Novel characters are imaginary—any fool knows that! How can they come to life? Ridiculous!"

He paused and confronted the pair, the girl having edged closed to the grinning youth on the sofa. He shook a lean finger at them.

"You two tell fishy stories! Teamwork, too. Sounds like a frame-up. Burglars, probably! I've a notion to call the police."

Basil smiled reproachfully.

"That's a fine way to talk to your own son—"

"And to your own wife's daughter," put in Gwendolyn.

Ogg pawed the air.

"Dry up, both of you! What bosh! You'll steal my wits as well as the family plate."

"If we *did*," said Basil, "it would be a manifestation of heredity."

"What in blazes do you mean, you impertinent child—that I'm a thief?"

"In a literary sense, yes. It's quite obvious. You pinched me as a character to palm off as your own brain child. Why, the moment I laid eyes on Gwendolyn, I knew that I'd seen her before. In my last literary life I was a character in a G. K. Chesterton novel, and she was a Robert Chambers heroine. We stood next to each other on a shelf in the Public Library, and we used to have long talks. You pinched me, and your wife froze on to Gwendolyn. Just a change of names—and there you are. Easy time you writing chaps have—get your characters like a ready-made suit of clothes, right off the shelf!"

Basil grinned, and got up from the sofa. Ogg was leaning limply against the desk. Basil slapped him on the shoulder and went on:

"But don't take on so, old sock! All the novelists do it. You're not alone in crime. Lord, I've been reincarnated so many times I've lost count!"

"Ain't it the truth, Basil?" agreed Gwendolyn. "Gosh, I'm glad the war's over. The way the novelist chaps dragged me up and down the map of Europe was a caution. Had to learn half a dozen languages and live in filthy holes—a lady spy one time, then a Red Cross nurse, a Belgian refugee, and a forlorn war bride back in Blighty. Terrible!"

"I know how you feel, old girl," said Basil sympathetically. "It has been the same way with me. I had to do my bit. The writer chaps made me. Why, I even did a turn in Archangel!"

Gwendolyn laughed.

"Eternal life for us, eh? We're a thousand years old, anyway."

"Easily that, and then some. Why, girly, Rider Haggard even had me in Tibet. I was one of those long-lived monks on the edge of nowhere. And goodness knows where Haggard cribbed me from. My memory doesn't stretch that far back!"

"But let's not kick," said Gwendolyn. "Look how popular we are. If some author broke the union rules, and got original, and created a brand-new hero or heroine or plot—all new and no rebuilt models—why, old boy, we'd be out of a job!"

Ogg bounced out of his stupor.

"I say, you two—"

Basil was too busy to notice him.

"So we would. But, say, that union thing is a ripping idea. Let's form a union of our own!"

"Splendid! What 'll we call it?"

"The Authors' Characters' Union."

"No," said Gwendolyn, "that sounds as if the authors own us. Besides—"

"God knows we don't own you!" exclaimed Ogg, shaking his head belligerently. "A couple of hero Bolsheviks organizing a union right in my own study! I ought to call an officer—"

"Oh, go and tickle your typewriter," broke in Basil. He turned back to the girl. "Well, call it the Literary Characters' Union."

"No," she objected, "that's sailing under false colors. We're not very literary, are we? I ask you!" She smiled toward Ogg, who made a wry face, picked a newspaper off the desk, and pretended to be reading it.

Basil laughed.

"That's a shot for papa! You're right, we're hardly literary. I've often heard people calling the book I happened to be in a potboiler!"

"Yes," said Gwendolyn, "and I've often been mortified to death when a book I was in was barred from young ladies' boarding schools."

"We do get into rough hands," Basil sighed. "We ought to legislate in our union rules against hack writers who misuse us."

"And we must demand union hours, Basil. Why, my next to last author kept me working like a truck horse in love scenes, day and night. None of us got a moment's rest—and the story covered a period of three weeks! I had to go away for the summer and rest up as a character in a dull farm story—daughter of the village vicar doing charities among the poor farm hands and their overworked wives, and lying out on the mossy bank of the lazy river thinking about the *Prince Charming* from Broadway who never came. It was frightfully dull and unexciting; but I got my health and strength back, and I was all full of pep when Mother Ogg grabbed me."

Basil smiled sympathetically and suggested that they might leave the uncomfortable Ogg to his own devices.

"Let's go over to the Public Library and call a meeting of characters. We'll find them all there, including ourselves—all our other selves."

The novelist looked relieved. He slipped off the desk and hurried over to open the door.

"Yes, get out—both of you!" he said. "Go—before you reveal your real characters and loot the house!"

As they went out, Basil mocked him:

"I really ought to bust you one for such insults, pop—but then there's a law against parricide."

Ogg slammed the door.

IV

FOR the moment, peace reigned in the study, though not in Matthew Ogg's mind. His overtaxed brain felt like a soft-boiled egg. He debated whether to call the police or to send for an alienist. He was troubled over the quarrel with his wife, and worried over his amazing visitors. The monumental absurdity of their conversation was practically contradicted by the extraordinary coincidence of their relation to the notes for the novel he and his bride had made. And their inexplicable presence—one behind the bookcase, the other behind the davenport!

Ogg wondered if this was the way people felt when they began to go insane. He decided to call his wife and tell her the whole bewildering story. Sophie, with her common sense, would help him.

He opened the door to call her — and Gwendolyn walked in!

"Oh!" she said. "How you startled me! I was just going to knock. I forgot something."

The confused novelist backed into the room till he bumped against the desk. He watched the girl as she carefully shut the door and came close to him. Utterly unable to resist, as if under a hypnotic eye, he glassily watched her play with the end of his tie.

"Now, foster papa, I want you to be nice," she said purringly. "I've sent Basil on to the Public Library. I've been appointed an officer of our union—chairman of the finance committee."

"Finance committee?" Matthew repeated hazily.

"Finance committee—that's it. What I want to know is, how do we eat? Where do we sleep?"

Ogg laughed vacantly.

"Now it's blackmail, eh? Why not sleep in my house?" His tone was bitter. "You've taken possession of it, anyway. Come and live with me, little girl!"

That last remark of his was extremely unfortunate; for, just in time to hear it, came Mrs. Ogg—the exasperated, resentful Mrs. Ogg, smarting under the unhealed fracture of her literary ambitions!

She was in no mood to hear her new husband issue such an invitation to a person whom he called "little girl." She was only just in time, and the detective instinct that most women have halted her, all brakes set, before she had burst upon the scene.

She had come through the dining room, and the half opened door of the study shielded her. It also hid from her view the couple in the study, but she could hear her husband's voice, and that telltale last sentence; and now she heard a feminine voice.

"That's a dear old papa!" the girl exclaimed enthusiastically. "I'm going to kiss you for that!"

She did. Mrs. Ogg, by reason of the door ajar, missed the picture of the kiss, but she heard the smack all too plainly. She frowned forbiddingly, gritted her teeth, clenched her fists—and waited, afraid that she would hear more and afraid that she wouldn't hear more. Unfortunately for Ogg, she did not see him struggle weakly and ineffectually against the kiss.

"You *are* an old darling!" Gwendolyn was rattling on. "Mother will love you more and more for recognizing me as your child!"

The woman hidden in the doorway nearly fainted. She smothered a cry, which ended in a gulp. The noise, slight as it was, rasped Ogg's frazzled nerves.

"What was that?" he demanded hoarsely, drawing away from his tormentor in alarm.

"Nothing, old dear. Probably your conscience sneezed."

"More likely yours, if you had one," returned Ogg bitterly, recovering himself. "Now what do you want? Be quick! My wife may return at any moment."

The eavesdropping Mrs. Ogg glared triumphantly at a knot in the door. She shivered to think how close she came to missing this clandestine meeting. Right in their own house, too!

"Oh, she won't mind," said the girl, blithely unaware that she was minding hugely, silently objecting with a calm, cold, stern "I will bide my time" look on her face.

"I want money," Gwendolyn went on. "You've got to give me money to live on. Wasn't I brought into the world behind your bookcase?"

That just about finished the hidden Mrs. Ogg. Vaguely she heard the rustle of money. She pushed open the door just as Ogg, his bill case in his hand, was giving the girl several bank notes.

"Oh, all right," he was saying, in the tired tone of a man who knew when he was beaten and helpless. "I suppose you've got me!"

Then Ogg saw Mrs. Ogg.

Everything instantly seemed topsy-turvy. His jaw dropped. He turned pale and reeled.

The girl's back was toward the dining room door. She looked up from the more attractive task of counting the money. Half a glance was enough. She saw the stern figure of Mrs. Ogg. With a little scream, she ran to the closed hall door and hid her face in her arm. Her shoulders shook like quivering jelly.

Mrs. Ogg ignored her. She would crush the man first!

She glared fiercely at the wabbly-kneed novelist.

"She's got you, has she? You're wrong, Matthew Ogg! It's I who have got you—both of you!"

Her distraught target fumbled feebly for words.

"B-but, my dear—" he began, with a smirk.

His wife was ruthless.

"I saw you, Matthew Ogg! You can't deny it. I saw you give money to this woman!"

"I'll ex-explain—"

"Didn't you?" she insisted.

"Yes, my dear."

Ogg was weak and chastened. The stern figure of wrath, standing there like a recording angel, a female prosecuting attorney, hurt his eyes.

"Are you keeping her?"

His cross-examiner's question was frigidly sarcastic.

"No—yes—oh, hell, *no!*"

Ogg was becoming panicky. He stole a glance at the girl, who was still hiding her face against the hall door. He wondered how soon she would be mincemeat.

"Guilty confusion!" rasped Mrs. Ogg. "A horrible secret in your life! A *child!* Oh, you—you beast!"

Icicles in her tone were melting. Hysteria was imminent. She collapsed into a chair, burying her face in her hands.

Ogg pulled himself together.

"Not *my* child," he said gruffly. "*Your* child!"

His wife looked up, wild-eyed.

"Mine?" she shrilled. "What nonsense! Are you mad or—"

Somebody had laughed — actually laughed! At such a tragic moment! Mrs. Ogg bit off her remark indignantly. She looked around, and saw the charming, laughing face of the hitherto ignored young female. Tiring of her self-imposed punishment of standing with her face to the wall, Gwendolyn propelled herself into the scene.

Mrs. Ogg gulped twice and leaped up. She seized the girl's hand.

"Gwen? *You?*" she shrilled.

Ogg popped to attention.

"Yes, mother," Gwendolyn said chastely. "Aren't you glad it wasn't somebody else?"

"Then you *are* Gwendolyn?" demanded Ogg.

"Sure I'm Gwen!"

Ogg seemed awed.

"Out of a book—a manuscript—an unwritten book! Lord help us, we're all as mad as rabbits!"

V

Mrs. Ogg stared at them in perplexity.

"What do you mean, out of a book? You're incoherent." She turned to Gwen. "What brought you here, child?"

"You did, Sophie," said Ogg, grinning maliciously, for this was the first remark that had pleased him.

"No, Basil did," corrected Gwen.

"Basil?" exclaimed Ogg, staggering under another shock. "Then Basil is real, too, is he?"

"Of course he's real!"

"Great godfather! Two characters come to life! She sticks to it! And Sophie recognizes her brain child! A padded cell—quick!"

Mrs. Ogg looked at him in astonishment.

"What's all this raving?" she demanded. "Who's Basil?"

"He's mine," said Gwen.

"No, he's mine," argued Ogg, with a smirk. "You said so yourself—I created him."

"You silly thing!" Gwen broke in. "He's real, and he's mine—the sweet boy!"

Ogg was too far gone to hear. He grinned vacantly and pointed at his wife.

"It's your fault, Sophie. You threw him up against the wall, and he was born behind the sofa. Scandalous!"

"What?" exploded his bewildered bride.

"Listen—" pleaded Gwen.

Ogg was pacing up and down the room, clapping his hands like an automaton, and mumbling:

"An emancipated hero — broke out of the library—turned Bolshevik—organizer of the Literary Characters' Union—a fresh youth, too—referred to me as an 'elderly tragedian'!"

Mrs. Ogg stamped her foot.

"End this nonsense!" she cried angrily. "What are you two talking about? Shut up, Matthew Ogg! Now, Gwen, you tell me what this is all about. Talk sense!"

"Well, you see, mother—"

The novelist interrupted stridently.

"There she goes again with that mother business! Mrs. Ogg, I demand to know here and now whether you are this young female's mother or not!"

"Young female, indeed!" exclaimed his

wife indignantly. "A fine way to talk about my little niece!"

"Great Cæsar's ghost! Niece! Then you're not her mother? Why the devil does she keep calling you mother? She's been doing it all morning."

"No, I'm not her mother. She's my sister's little girl."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Ogg fervently. "She's been placed genealogically! You admit, then, that she's not *my* hidden child—not the dark secret in *my* life?"

"Oh, Matthew, don't be absurd! I call her my child and she calls me mother because I'm her foster mother — the only m-mother she's got!" Mrs. Ogg was getting damp again. "I adopted her, a wee baby, when my poor sister and her husband died. I know it's a shock to you, Matthew. I should have t-told you; but I just forgot. It didn't in-interest you when I was just your se-secretary. And since then, with her safely in school, as I thought, and my mind taken up with other things—"

"With plots and romantic characters," put in Ogg meanly.

Gwen giggled.

"See, I told you you were my foster papa!"

Ogg drew himself up sternly, rapidly gathering confidence and masterfulness. His tone attained paternal severity.

"Now, young lady, perhaps you will be good enough to tell your aunt — I mean your mother — what a young hoodlum you've been in my study!"

"Don't you call Gwen a hoodlum!" said Mrs. Ogg, bristling.

"Well, I was, mother. That wouldn't be anything new—you know that. I just couldn't stand that dreadful Miss Plank's School for Young Ladies another moment. Miss Plank would second the motion about me being a hoodlum, all right. She was on the point of writing you to take me away when I beat it."

"Gwen!" her foster mother reproved. "What horrible language!"

"Well, I skipped—I mean, I left. And I met Basil—"

"Who *is* Basil?"

"My hero!" said Ogg savagely.

"No — mine," smiled the girl. "He's the beautifulest boy you ever saw. Goes to Axminster College, across the lake from Miss Plank's—or, rather, he *did* go there. He beat it, too—with me. I've known him three years. We're eloping!"

The Ogg family gasped.

"He followed me up to Uncle Henry's each summer, and worked on the farm, just to be near me," Gwen rattled on. "Wasn't it romantic? I guess they were going to fire him from college about now, too; so we ran away at the psychological moment. We didn't exactly elope, either; for we came right here—got in this morning—to ask if we could be married. We just walked in, and nobody was in sight. Then we heard you and Papa Ogg in the dining room, arguing about the novel—"

"Gwen!"

Mrs. Ogg was horrified. It is humiliating to have children hear a family fight.

"Yes," Gwen ran on, "we heard it all. We thought it was just too funny about you naming your heroine after me, and Papa Ogg happening to pick out a name like Basil—just like one of those stupid coincidences in a novel." She smiled mischievously at Ogg, who got red. "Then we heard you coming. I made Basil get behind the sofa, and I squeezed behind the bookcase, to play a joke on you. We listened, and then there was another coincidence—just like a sure enough story—you throwing the manuscripts, mother! And when you dashed out in a huff—"

"Gwen!" exclaimed Mrs. Ogg feebly.

She felt ridiculous, especially when she noticed her husband's fiendish grin.

"Well, anyway," Gwen went on, "when you threw the manuscripts every which way, I had a bright idea—"

"Corking idea—my hat!" exclaimed Ogg.

The girl ignored the interruption.

"It made me boil to hear Papa Ogg sneer at my name and call it anæmic; so I pretended I was your heroine come to life out of your manuscript. I gave Basil the office—he was on, quick as a wink — and he pretended he was the hero, jolted to life when you cracked Papa Ogg's notes up against the wall. We just had a perfectly glorious time pulling Papa Ogg's leg—and then you busted in!"

Out of breath, Gwen took refuge in giggling. Ogg was silent. He would let Mrs. Ogg speak; it wasn't his funeral now.

"I don't know what I'll ever do with you, Gwen," Mrs. Ogg said weakly. "You're such a responsibility!"

Gwen brightened.

"Let Basil have me," she suggested. "He wants me."

"Yes, do!" said Ogg spitefully. "You ought to punish Basil, too!"

That earned him reproachful glances from both the girl and her mother.

"Where is Basil?" asked Mrs. Ogg, after a pause.

"Oh, he's in the pantry," replied Gwen. "I hid him there while I came back to touch Papa Ogg for the price of a marriage license."

"Holy mackerel!" cried the dismayed novelist. "What a nerve! Is Basil broke?"

"Yes, but he's ambitious—like a poor but honest hero in a novel. Wait—I'll call him."

She skipped over, opened the door to the hall, and gave one of those shrill feminine "ooo-hoo" cries.

In a moment the young man appeared in the doorway. He smiled and walked in with the utmost assurance, one arm around Gwen's waist. Quite evidently he had been listening. His weather forecast was "fair, with no change in temperature." Ogg regarded him suspiciously, as if he wanted to touch him to assure himself of the young man's solidity.

"Mother," said Gwen, "this is Basil."

The youth bowed.

"A pleasure indeed—er—mother!" he said politely.

Mrs. Ogg smiled feebly. Ogg frowned and pushed forward.

"Say," he demanded, "is your name really Basil?"

"Yes—it's my middle name."

"Mainwaring?" persisted Ogg.

The other laughed.

"No — Smith — plain John B. Smith. The Basil is silent, as in B. Much commoner, isn't it? Plain names are the thing —what?"

Ogg started to say something, but Basil had the floor.

"Wait!" he went on. "Let's come to the point and talk business. We're going to get married, Gwen and yours truly. Breaks all fiction speed records—hero and heroine get married before the first chapter's even down on paper. 'Chapter One—Wedding Bells'! Great line! Rejuvenation of fiction! New literary era dawns—the firm of Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Ogg frames up the novels, and the firm of Mr. and Mrs. J. Basil Smith hammers 'em out on the typewriter! Gwen and I are both good typists—we learned to typewrite, as well as to love each other, in school. We're broke—haven't a nickel to start our married life on—and we need a job—I mean jobs, plural. Collaboration of brains—collaboration of hands! Do we get the job—jobs?"

A SONG OF ROSES

The red rose flaunts its beauteous bloom
  Where the worldly folk abide;
The white rose, set in a templed room,
  Is enamored of pomp and pride;
But the wild rose breathes its soft perfume
  O'er the quiet countryside.

The white rose blooms in the current mode,
  In a glassed and sheltered hall;
The red rose brightens a proud abode,
  And is trained on the garden wall;
But the wild rose flowers by the open road,
  To gladden the hearts of all.

The red rose throbs of the lustful years,
  As the mad world marches on;
The white rose sobs of our doubts and fears
  When a life we have loved is gone;
But the wild rose smiles through its morning tears
  That a new day brings its dawn!

Edmund Vance Cooke

The Bullfighter

A ROMANCE OF THE THRILLING SPORT OF THE ARENA

By T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright," "East Is East," etc.

PANCHO PACHECHO, a young Venezuelan of humble birth, has won fame and money as a favorite *torero* of the bull ring in Caracas, under the name of Angelito. He has built himself a showy house, in which he lives with his mother; but the old peasant woman poses as his servant, lest she should disgrace her son before his fine new friends.

One of these friends is Rafael Jiminez, a young aristocrat of Paraiso, the fashionable quarter of Caracas. Young Jiminez, who is full of romantic ideas, is a poet and an amateur *torero*. When Angelito goes to the provincial city of Valencia for a bullfight, Rafael insists on accompanying him as second swordsman, and is gored by a bull. Angelito takes his wounded friend to his own house in Caracas, and Rafael's mother, Señora Jiminez, and his sister, Señorita Socorro Jiminez, go there to nurse him. Thus thrown in contact with the handsome *señorita,* the *torero* falls desperately in love with her, and she—in spite of her social superiority, and although she is betrothed to a man of her own caste, Narciso Montauban—is strangely impressed with the stalwart Angelito.

Rafael recovers from his wound, and is brought back from Angelito's house to the Jiminez villa. On the following Sunday, Señor Montauban takes his *fiancée,* with her mother and a friend, Señorita Margarita Miraflores, to his box at the Nuevo Circo, to attend the weekly bullfight. Socorro Jiminez sees Angelito enter the arena to kill the first bull; and as the powerful brute charges him, she falls in a dead faint.

XIII

WHEN Señor Montauban delivered his unfortunate box party at the Jiminez home, Socorro Jiminez walked weakly up the long path from the tall iron fence to the house. She retired immediately to her bedchamber, and lay down on a pink covered bed. The maid, Lizetta, removed her slippers and loosened her dress, while Margarita helped to make her friend comfortable with a sympathetic monologue.

"The excitement was too much for you, *carisima.* I am sure it was a judgment of Providence, for we really ought not to have gone out so soon after Rafael's illness. At least, it was ill mannered, and one might as well be wicked as ill mannered. If I were Providence, I would punish one as quickly as the other."

Later Lizetta prepared the invalid a cup of strong coffee. Señorita Jiminez drank the black liquid, and then Margarita closed the jalousies to keep out the green glare reflected from the shrubbery, and the friend and the maid tiptoed from the room.

Socorro Jiminez remained in the cool, darkened chamber with the vision of the bullfight still harassing her nerves. The fight was still in progress, she knew. It would continue for some two hours longer. She lifted her head and tried to make out the time from a little gilt clock on her dressing table. She could see merely the round blur of its dial, which shook to a throbbing in her eyes.

For two more hours bull after bull would be turned into the arena, and if Angelito made any false step, any miscalculated movement, it might result in his sudden and terrible death. The very midriff of the girl seemed to writhe within her. Lying down became unbearable. She pushed herself up and stared about her chamber.

"Holy Virgin," she murmured, "I think I must be mad! I have overworked from nursing Rafael."

But the mere thought of Rafael reproduced the blue *casa* on Traposo Calle, the queer ornamentation of his sick room, the tinted columns of the *patio,* and the owner of the house, whose eyes had followed her perpetually as she came and went. And

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at this very moment the man who had watched her so unhappily was fighting bulls in the *circo!*

She drew a deep breath. Then she thought:

"Nothing will happen to him. He has been our leading *diestro* for years. Nothing will happen to him. I wonder where he came from!"

She lay back down, closed her eyes, and tried to drop off into a siesta; but she remained intensely awake behind her closed lids. She thought of Señor Montauban, and of her approaching marriage to him. The idea brought her a queer little feeling of distress.

Heretofore the notion of marriage with the little editor connoted mainly the managing of the Montauban château, directing the Montauban servants, preparing for balls and dinners, and driving in the Montauban motor. Narciso, heretofore, had entered into these reveries as a graceful partner. Now, as Socorro lay with closed lids, this strange commotion within her made her realize that marriage was something quite other than these things. She felt that it was a vital and formidable thing; that out of the obscure clouds of marriage some sort of emotional and spiritual storm would surely beset her.

A vivid image of Señor Montauban popped before her eyes—his baldness, his witheredness, his precise articulation, all a little exaggerated, a little burlesqued, as if some imp in her brain would caricature him. As she stared at this image and thought of his eternal criticisms, his annoying meticulousness, his disagreeable little gusts of caresses, a sort of horror passed over Socorro.

She opened her eyes, got up abruptly from her bed, thrust her small silk-clad feet into red boudoir slippers, and moved nervously about the room. As she passed her mirror, she paused to correct her disheveled appearance. She fastened her dress at the throat, and tucked in a few loose strands of hair. Then she opened the door that connected her room with the *patio*.

The glare of yellow sunshine made her blink for a moment, and then she walked across the *patio* to the room opposite her own. The door of this chamber stood open, and, looking through the entrance, she saw Rafael leaning back among a pile of pillows, with a writing board propped against an upraised knee. On her brother's handsome face there was a look of suffering and cynicism which Socorro had never observed before.

As the girl came through the sunshine to his room, Rafael glanced up at her. He continued gazing at her abstractedly for several moments, as if he did not see her. Then he said, as if faintly startled:

"Ah, come in, Socorro! *Maman* and Margarita told me about your fainting at the *circo*. The sport seems to be rather hard on us Jiminezes." He smiled slightly. "How do you feel now?"

The girl entered the room, and noticed its smell of cigarette smoke.

"Better, *gracias*. The coffee helped me, I think."

She hesitated a moment as Rafael motioned her to a chair. Then, as she sank into it, she asked:

"Did they tell you why I fainted?"

"They said you were worrying over me." He paused a moment, regarding her interrogatively. "I didn't exactly believe that," he added.

"No?"

"No, but I didn't say anything."

"Why?"

Rafael made a weak, discouraged gesture with his hands.

"I've quit talking to them, Socorro."

The girl was shocked.

"*Anda*, Rafael! You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do. What's the use? They never seem to understand what I'm talking about."

"They understand Spanish, Rafael."

"You know what I mean. Everything I think or say is simply foolishness to them."

Socorro sat staring at her brother.

"And yet you are going to marry Margarita!" she observed anxiously.

Rafael looked at her with a faint quirking of the lips.

"I believe I am not the only one in this *casa* about to be married."

Socorro's face reddened, and she looked away at the sharp definition of the sunshine where it fell in through the doorway. It was so bright that it seemed a white, ethereal flame burning on the floor. After a while she asked:

"What are you writing?"

"A poem."

"Read it to me."

"It isn't finished."

"What are you going to call it?"

"'Glands.'"

"What a queer name for a poem!"

"*Cà*, yes, it's queer. I call it that to be different. Everything I do or say, Socorro, you understand, is merely to be different."

In the girl's tremulous mood this faint irony filled her with pathos. She leaned forward and pressed the invalid's hand.

"Poor Rafael! I suppose you are quite alone writing your poems!" She gave a deep sigh, and leaned back with arms outstretched, so that she might still hold the wounded man's hand. "I do wish Margarita could understand you a little better, Rafael—I do indeed!"

"Do you remember the Greek myth, Socorro, about Paris and his golden apple?"

"*Pues*, yes?"

"I am sure he would have liked very much to divide his golden apple between Venus and Minerva, and to give each goddess half, but that was impossible. There is no way to divide the apple, Socorro, or to combine the two goddesses into one. I think every human being reaches an *impasse* of that sort at last."

"What a terrible idea!"

"No—it simply means that every person's idea of happiness is a bundle of contradictions. To acquire one thing, a person must sacrifice some other thing. The more you think about it, the simpler it grows, and—the more absurd."

Socorro was shocked at this unexpected revelation of her brother's chronic unhappiness. It appealed to her more keenly now that he was crippled. She felt tears wet her eyes as she gazed tenderly at him.

"But surely, Rafael," she cried, disregarding the logic of his pessimism, "surely out of a whole city you can find some girl who will bring you sympathy and understanding and—and all your heart desires!"

The poet stroked his sister's fingers with a mirthless smile.

"That seems true to all of us when we are young and unphilosophic, Socorro. Every one feels that somewhere on earth there is a perfect being who will understand him deeply and satisfy him profoundly; but the wait stretches out and out, and finally we grow weary and begin to lose faith in our ideal who never, never comes. At last we marry just an ordinary person, and that phase of life is finished and done."

Socorro leaned forward with horror on her face. An understanding born of her own new passion shook her.

"Oh, Rafael, don't say that! Don't think it, dear Rafael! You know God would not mock us with dreams if they could never, never be realized!"

She slipped an arm about his neck and began weeping softly on his shoulder, spending her pain of the *circo* in her grief.

The poet put an arm about his sister and stroked her shoulder.

"Hush, Socorro! Very likely I am all wrong. My thoughts wander about madly and contradict themselves. Sometimes I have thought that our first dream of love seeks no mortal at all, but that we are trying to unite ourselves with God, our desires are so vague and mysterious and half religious. Dear sister, I don't know who has stirred you so that you faint at the *circo* and then come weeping to me; but I know it was not my wounds that did it. A sister's kindness is more composed than that."

Socorro felt her brother pat her face and press her hot cheek against his own. She lay breathing unevenly, and was rather awestruck at the depth of her brother's wisdom.

"I don't know how to answer you," she said at last.

"Then don't answer me at all."

There came a silence. Then she began tentatively:

"At the *circo* I—I could not endure to see—"

She stopped.

"Yes, *carisima?*"

"To see the—the bull charge—"

"Yes?"

"Angelito," she whispered, and her face swept hot once more.

Again there came a silence. Socorro felt her brother bend his head a trifle, to glance down at her face. She turned her hot face away from his eyes, flooded with a sense of shame, and wondering what he would say.

"Angelito!" repeated Rafael in an amazed voice.

She nodded faintly, her whole sensorium painfully alert to catch his next reaction.

There came a long, disheartening pause. Then Rafael asked:

"But, Socorro, how could you have known him at all? Did you talk with him when I was sick?"

The girl shook her head mutely.

"Did he send you messages?"

"No."

"Then, Socorro, dear sister, how—what—"

The girl turned her face under her brother's chin.

"Oh, Rafael, I don't know! He just kept looking at me. Margarita noticed it—everybody noticed it. That was why *maman* was so unpleasant to him. He seemed so strong, and so unhappy! And his poor dinner! He needed some girl to keep things straight for him. And now what you say about every man waiting for some one—it is pitiful. Everybody is pitiful, and he seems the most pitiful of all!"

Here Socorro clutched her brother's neck and began sobbing frankly out of pity.

Rafael held his sister silently and enigmatically. At last she ceased weeping, and asked in a small voice:

"*Pues,* what am I to do?"

"I—don't know."

"I don't suppose I shall ever see him again, except when he is fighting bulls, and that makes me faint."

"Angelito!" repeated Rafael.

Socorro moved her head a trifle.

"Are you going to be against me, too?"

"I?"

"Well, you know everybody is going to be against me—*maman* and Margarita and—and everybody. I'm going to have a terrible scene if this comes out!"

Rafael drew a long breath, which lifted Socorro's head a trifle.

"No-o-o," he dragged out at last. "I am not exactly against you, Socorro."

"Then you'll talk for me against *maman* and Margarita?" she asked quickly. "You know, darling, you talk so well!"

Rafael was not prepared to argue that he didn't talk well. He cleared his throat and said nothing.

"So I am going to expect you to, Rafael," said Socorro, sitting up and looking at her brother with a flushed face.

"*Pues,* you have philosophy on your side, Socorro—biology, an instinctive return to the earth. You know the old fable about the wrestler Antæus, who, each time he was thrown to earth, arose stronger than ever. Well, the passion of the aristocrat for the—"

Socorro did not follow Rafael's application of the old fable of Antæus. Love and admiration for her brother flooded the girl. He was going to talk for her!

She knew that he would puzzle and confuse her mother and Margarita, so that neither would be able to make heads or tails of what he would say. There would be much recrimination, but it was far better that she should have Rafael on her side than against her. Nobody could be positive that what he said meant anything; and whether he meant anything or not, he would talk endlessly and cuttingly, and she could sit silent through it all.

She was delighted to get Rafael on her side. She pressed her cheek to his once more, then got up and went quickly to her room.

She hardly knew why she had done any of these things; but her talk with Rafael, apparently, had started her on a course of action which she now pursued swiftly and mechanically. She went straight to her room and wrote a note.

"To his excellency, Señor Gabrielo Angel," the note began. It continued thus:

ESTIMABLE SENOR:

I think you are not treating my brother very kindly, to save his life, take him into your *casa,* and then desert him without a word. We would all be very glad to see you, if you can find the time to call. We are at home any evening after seven. With the utmost respect, I am

Your *amiga,*

SOCORRO DE JESUS JIMINEZ.

As she placed this note in an envelope, she wondered, with a certain discomfort, what Narciso Montauban would think about it.

XIV

AFTER the trumpet had sounded the death of the last bull, and the mules had trotted in and dragged out its body, the trumpeter of the Nuevo Circo, high up on the northern tier of seats, wiped the mouth of his instrument and slipped it into its dirty bag. Then he stood yawning and looking indolently about him.

Already the spectators were trickling through the great oval incline of seats toward the exit. A thin applause still sounded here and there, but it was lost in the wide spaces of the amphitheater.

As the mules dragged out the last dead bull, the *banderilleros* and *espadas* went about the long, circling balustrade, gathering the cloaks which they had flung up at the beginning of the *corrida.* Those spectators who had been honored with a cloak still lingered in their boxes, to toss back the garment and exchange a compliment with the fighter. Such trifling courtesies were going on all around the oval.

Angelito walked quickly toward the press box, looking forward to this slight social contact with Socorro Jiminez. When he reached the place, he saw that it was deserted, and that his cloak was spread on the balustrade of an empty box.

The bullfighter stood on the sand below, looking up at the piece of carmine velvet left hanging on the rail. A devotee of the sport, three boxes distant, saw the *espada's* plight, and came hurrying around to throw the abandoned cloak down to its owner. The man himself seemed incensed at such an indignity.

"*Caramba,* Señor Angelito!" he cried, as he brushed away some specks of dust on the velvet, and then swung it carefully down into the hands of its owner. "You must excuse such boors. She was doubtless some pretty *mujer* from the provinces, who understands nothing."

The *torero* did not know the man who tossed him his cloak. He bowed with a hot face, murmured a "*gracias,*" and went hurrying away toward the dressing room at the southern end of the *circo.*

There Angelito found some of his fellow players taking off their bright ring costumes, while others were already in the showers, washing off the sweat and smell of the bullfight. No one had been hurt, and they were all in a gay mood, shouting and laughing at one another amid the splash and hiss of the water. Much of their talk was of the coming Spanish *corrida,* and of who would be second *espada* to the great Juan Leon.

Ercolito, a mulatto with slender legs, large feet, and splendidly carved shoulders, shouted that he did not want the place. He said he was accustomed to standing up before the slow creole bulls, and the idea of facing a fast Spanish bull was enough to make him—

Here Ercolito used a coarse expression which set the dressing room laughing. The other attendants and the youthful *monosabios* began using the same gross jests, each one attempting to speak a little more foully than the last.

Of late such obscenity had become detestable to Angelito. At this moment it accented the insult he believed Socorro Jiminez had given him, and somehow it seemed to justify that insult. She was right in refusing him the small courtesy of tossing back his cloak. All bullfighters were lewd fellows, and so had he been until he met her. They were nothing but peons whom a turn of fortune had thrust into the glare of fame and wealth; but peons they were and peons they would remain, foul of mind and heart.

The *torero* finished dressing as quickly as he could, and got away from his companions. He started back through the arena, meaning to catch a bus in the plaza.

By this time the amphitheater was entirely deserted. The declining sun filled it with a yellow light, which blurred the distant sweep of seats into an ocherous slope. It might have been that golden cloud which, Angelito so often imagined, lowered Socorro Jiminez every Sunday afternoon, in order that she might see him risk his life in the bull ring for her amusement, and then, when he had finished, lifted her back up into the heaven from whence she came.

That was a heaven forever closed to him. He could only stand on the solid sand, caked by the blood of bulls he had slain, and see her float away from him without so much as a word.

If she had only given him a moment's chance, what would he not say to her?

"*Señorita,*" he would say, "I know I am a vile fellow, but the very look of your heavenly face has purified my heart. Indeed, *señorita,* you are like the saints in the cathedral, and the mere thought of you saves me from all sinful fancies. Only that moment, *señorita,* I was driven out of the dressing room because your image filled my heart, and I could not bear to think of you in the presence of such obscenity. And yet you insult the poor cloak of the man who worships you!"

The *torero* made a tragic gesture as he hurried along in the immensity of the amphitheater. He felt the high purity of his rôle with a Latin sense of drama.

As he passed out of the *circo,* he heard the ticket seller whistling gayly in his little booth in the outer wall. Angelito could see him as he sat behind the bars of the ticket window, hurrying through the last of his accounts.

The *torero* hissed at a cab on the other side of the plaza, and then stood looking at the ticket vender with a change of mood.

"Now listen to that ticket butcher whistle," he thought gloomily. "He is hurrying through to go to see some *querida,* some simple girl, and here I stand, Angelito, the premier *espada* in Caracas, who makes as much in one Sunday afternoon as that *bribon* does all year long, and I feel as if ten devils were lodged in the pit of my stomach. *Diablo!* I should say there are a hundred *señoritas* in Caracas who would welcome me to one who would glance at that *bobo*. That shows what a fool I am to stand here thinking of a girl who leaves my cloak hanging on her balustrade, when I could go to a score of women!"

He hissed again at the cabman. This time the driver caught the signal, pulled his horses around, and trotted toward the *torero*.

As the cab came across the square, Angelito turned over in his mind several addresses at which he knew he would be very welcome indeed. He selected one.

"All I will have to do," he mused, as the cab came up, "will simply be to step in, call that address, and then sit still. That is all I will have to do."

But, when the cab reached him, the thought of calling on any other woman was as repugnant to the *torero* as the coarse conversation in the dressing room had been. He stepped into the vehicle, gave his own address on Traposo Calle, and rode away. This struck Angelito as an extraordinary conclusion to his musings, and rather a distressful one.

"*Caramba!*" he thought. "How long am I to be deprived of all the natural pleasures of men, just because a *señorita* refused to toss back my cloak? Certainly I am as mad as a crab that runs backward from everything it sees!"

In this predicament he leaned forward impulsively and shared his trouble with the driver, as one peon confides in another.

"Brother," he shouted earnestly, above the rattle of the cobblestones, "a woman is a terrible thing!"

The cabman turned, looked down from his perch, and took an immediate and intimate interest in his fare.

"That is true, *señor*," he agreed earnestly. "Doesn't Pedro Ibana know that? A bad woman, *señor*, is a limb of Satan. Everything goes—a man's money, his health, his reputation, his peace of mind, his very soul! If there is a man in Caracas who knows that, *señor*, it is Pedro Ibana!"

"*Hombre!*" cried Angelito, leaning forward and holding to the top as the cab jounced over the cobbles. "What you say is true enough—a bad woman is the whip of the devil; but if you want to roast on the very grid of hell, Señor Ibana, go to a good woman!"

Señor Ibana was amazed. He stared at his fare with his whip poised.

"A good woman, *señor?*"

"*Sí, señor*—a good woman! She spoils all a man's natural enjoyments, and furnishes none in return. You cannot leave her and forget her, as you would an ordinary baggage. *Dios in cielo*, you cannot do that, any more than you could turn away from the saints in paradise! Ah, Señor Ibana, I know of no sadder sight than to behold a man with all the simple pleasures of his life corrupted and vitiated by a good woman!"

Angelito made a hopeless gesture with his free hand, and sank back against the cushions of his bumping cab. Nevertheless, the driver had been a comfort to him, for the temperament of the *torero* was such that he had to talk to some one when he was troubled.

The cab stopped, delivered him to the emptiness of the blue *casa* on Traposo Calle, and he was alone again. For several minutes he stood at his doorway, looking at the opalescence of the mountains in the last of the sunlight; but it was a mechanical gazing toward a brilliant view, for he did not see it.

He hated going inside. He hated seeing his mother, who, he knew, would begin reviling the Jiminez family again. Heretofore he had defended them, but Socorro's deliberate insult would stop his mouth. He could only sit silent and hear the vitriolic old woman scold and scold.

He thought of the girl again—how she had reached out for his cloak, had caught it eagerly, and then had gone away and left it. Angelito could not understand these contradictory gestures. He did not attempt to understand them. Simply, they had happened. She had welcomed his cloak, and then had deserted it.

The *diestro* drew out his keys, unlocked the bronze grating of his door, and then opened the small inner panel, and let himself inside.

To Angelito, the whole interior of his *casa* was redolent of Socorro Jiminez. As he walked into the entry, it seemed to him that he might meet her coming out. In the *patio* it seemed certain that presently she would come out of the front room and pass among the twisted pink columns. The ornate columns suggested the warm loveliness of the girl. They were two components of a whole, and Angelito could never see the one without recalling the other.

The bullfighter moved slowly down the *patio,* past his dining room, which had not been used since the evening of the banquet. He and his mother now ate their meals on a table in the kitchen, because the dining room table was occupied by the big chest of silver. Old Ana had repacked the whole set, wrapping each piece in its original tissue paper, and now the chest waited in a sort of indefinite suspense. Neither Angelito nor his mother quite knew whether it would eventually go back to the jeweler at a discount, or would be sold to some other buyer, or would remain in the blue *casa* as a nucleus of family plate, to admonish other lives in years to come with the brave legend, "To the Stars through Difficulties."

XV

As Angelito's footfalls sounded through the *patio,* a door opened farther down, and old Ana hurried out of her room.

"*Gracias* to the saints, Pancho!" she cried. "You are not hurt! *Caramba,* I heard your footsteps coming so slow I thought you had been wounded. You gave me a turn, *mi hijo!*"

"No," said the *espada* briefly. "The *corrida* was dull, tame." He meant to stop with this information, but he could not help adding: "I saw the Jiminez family in the press box."

"You did? Is Señor Rafael able to be out so soon?"

"No—Rafael was not there."

The old peon woman appeared to be deeply shocked.

"*Cà!* These hard-hearted aristocrats! A mother and a sister go right off to a bullfight after their boy has been hurt in one!"

"Ah, *madre,* they needed the air. They have been bound hand and foot with Rafael for a long time."

"They could have taken it a little more decently than by going to a bullfight. I say it looks heartless." She paused in her carping to look sharply at her son. "I suppose you flung up your cloak to the Señorita Jiminez?"

"No, I didn't," denied Angelito, hoping to avoid a rehearsal of the whole event.

"You didn't? Well, I'm glad of it. To whom did you fling your cloak?"

Her astonishment admitted that the Jiminezes were the proper persons to receive this favor.

"To a—she was a stranger," hesitated the bullfighter.

But the way he said it told the old woman the truth.

"Ah, *pouf!*" she shrugged. "You are always lying to me, Pancho!" She stood looking at him with reproachful eyes in her wrinkled old face, and added vindictively: "I wish you had not thrown your cloak to anybody. I wish you had just flung it down on the bench, and let it lie there. *Caramba,* those conceited Jiminezes!"

A hot flush swept over Angelito.

"*Diablo,* and so do I!" he flung out impulsively.

The old woman stared.

"So do you?"

"By the wounds of Christ," shouted Angelito, "I wish I had flung my cloak on the bench! I wish I had flung it in the dust!"

He made a furious gesture. His violence alarmed the old woman.

"Holy Virgin!" she cried with distended eyes. "*Mi hijo,* what has happened?" She stepped quickly to him, caught his arm, and peered anxiously into his face. "*Hijo mio,* what can have happened?"

The fighter's face darkened and his voice shook as he cried:

"A thousand devils, she flung it down! She flung it down in the ring there before all Caracas! She humbled me as if I had been a *monosabio,* as if I had been the very mule driver that hauls out the carrion!"

"*Dios,* have mercy!" gasped the crone, growing clay-colored at such an outrage.

"Such an insult was never borne before! God in heaven, if I were a peon, I would set their sugar field afire! I would hamstring their horses! God's lightning, I would poison their well!"

"Eh, eh, Pancho, my son, don't talk so loud!" warned the old woman fearfully. "*Caramba,* suppose some one should hear you!"

She glanced fearfully about the big empty *casa,* and then, for greater secrecy, drew her son toward her own poor room.

"But in God's name," she asked in a shaken voice, "why did she do it? Have you not treated her with every respect?"

"She simply wanted to humble me, to show me that I was nothing but a peon, that I was a madman to dream of looking at her. A thousand devils, I am mad!

I'm mad, mad, *madre!* I see nothing but that girl! This *patio,* my *casa,* the whole city, is filled with her. I never look anywhere but I see her just about to come to me. I think, feel, hear nothing but her, and she flings my cloak in the dust!"

He was in his mother's room now, with its earthen floor and grass bed. He threw himself on the ancient mahogany frame, face down, with oaths and sobs tearing at his throat.

The old woman stood aghast at this paroxysm. Gradually she began weeping with anger herself. She walked shakily to her crucifix, which hung on the wall with a candle beneath it. With trembling fingers she struck a match and adjusted its flame to the wick of the candle. The old woman knelt and lifted her weeping, furious eyes to the image.

"*Oh, Cristo!*" she wavered. "Comfort me by destroying these aristocrats! Bring death and desolation to them! Pour your curses upon them! Let the girl Socorro be a barren, miserable woman, a loveless bride and a childless wife! Thou knowest the aristocrats did my husband to death, they sent my brother to the reds, they poured contempt on me, and now they despise my son. Curse them, San Pablo! Curse them, San Tomas! May their souls sink to—"

At this point in old Ana's malediction there came a clangor at the doorbell. Angelito sprang up from the straw mattress.

"*Madre!*" he gasped. "Hurry to the door! It must be the *señorita* come to tell me she did not mean it! Hurry! *Pronto! Pronto!*"

He was lifting her up from where she knelt.

"Pancho, are you crazy?" the old woman cried angrily.

"Ana," said the bullfighter, in a loud voice, to his mother in his arms, "go to the door and see who it is!"

The old woman shook herself free and looked sourly at her son, but she went out. Presently she called back from the entry that it was a mulatto girl with a note.

The bullfighter was not accustomed to notes. He came out somewhat curiously into the *patio,* and then recognized the Jiminez servant standing with his mother in the entry. Instantly he suspected that Socorro Jiminez had really sent him a note. It struck him that that would be what Socorro would do—write him a note, perhaps an apology. His heart began to beat with a sudden happiness.

He went hurrying toward the entry, crying impatiently to his mother, who stood looking blankly at the note:

"Here, bring it here! Don't stand all day like that! What does it say?"

The servant girl turned to go.

"Hold on!" cried Angelito anxiously. "It may need an answer. *Diablo,* some notes do! Wait a few minutes, and I will see if it needs an answer."

"My mistress said it didn't need an answer," said the girl, who still seemed on the verge of going.

"Your mistress?" echoed old Ana, in surprise.

Angelito's heart gave a double beat. He was right. It was a note from Socorro.

"Here, let me have it! Wait, *muchacha,* just a moment! Let me read it!"

He took the note from his mother and unfolded it with hurried fingers. A vague perfume arose. He read slowly, forming the words with his lips:

"'To his excellency, Señor Gabrielo Angel—estimable *señor,*'" and so on.

As he read, an amazing light-heartedness filled him. He felt like dancing. He wanted to fling his arms about the mulatto girl and waltz in the entry.

"Tell your mistress I am coming right down to-night!" he cried gayly. "*Caramba,* to think she should write me a note! *Olà,* but it smells good!"

He put it to his nose and inhaled, then kissed it.

"*Sí, señor,*" nodded the girl, beginning to laugh.

"It smells like poetry!"

"Oh, *señora,* did you ever hear such a man?" cried the mulatto to Ana. "The *señorita's* note smells like poetry!"

"He is hopelessly mad!" declared old Ana ill-temperedly.

"Were you at the bullfight this afternoon?" asked Angelito, with a desire to work off his ebullition by gossiping.

"*Sí, señor.* I never miss a *circo* when you are in it."

"Is that true? You are flattering me. I only hope I will get into the big Spanish *corrida.*"

"Oh, so do I, *señor!*" cried the girl fervently. "I would much rather see you fight than Juan Leon."

"You will have your jest!" exclaimed Angelito, flattered. "*Pues,* tell your mistress I am coming down immediately, and I send her a thousand respects."

"I will, *señor. Adios, pues.*"

"*Adios, señorita.*"

The girl went out into the street. The bullfighter whirled, and flung an arm about his mother.

"There you are!" he cried gayly. "A note from a *señorita!* Ah, *madre,* I told you I was a *caballero!* A peon would hardly get this from a *señorita!*"

He swung the note playfully under her nose.

"But you are not going, Pancho?" she cried indignantly.

"*Seguramente,* I am going!"

"After she flung your cloak in the dust?"

The *torero* shrugged.

"*Cà!* She didn't exactly throw my cloak down in the dust."

"You said she did."

"That was just a way of speaking. What she really did was to go off and leave it hanging on her box." The *espada* made a slight gesture. "That was all—just left it hanging on the rail of her box."

"*Diablo,* that was all! Just left it hanging on the rail of her box! Wasn't that enough? Isn't it exactly the same as spitting on it? I am amazed at you, Pancho, to be ready to play the bear to a girl who has spit on your cloak, who has wounded your pride before all Caracas! *Caramba,* are you a dog or a man?"

"Now, *madre,*" laughed Angelito, "if no man forgave his *querida* when she gave him the cold mutton, I'm thinking not many men and women would be on speaking terms."

"But, *mi hijo,*" cried the old woman, exasperated, "this was such a shameless insult!"

"*Cà!*" The fighter rolled his head complacently. "When a woman wants to attract a man's attention, *madre,* she goes to extremes. It was her love—"

"*Huy! Huy!*" snapped the crone, completely out of temper. "What a fool! What a fool! Her love—it was her love! *Diablo,* she is without shame! A baggage who wants to show every one that she can play fast and loose with the finest sword in Caracas—humble you to the dust one minute, toss you to the sky the next! Pancho, you would sicken a buzzard!"

"La! La!" interrupted the son, with a good humor not to be dimmed. "I dare say you made my father dance to a pretty tune before he brought you around—eh, *madre?* Every *señorita* puts a man through his paces, doesn't she? I'll venture, when you were a girl, you were driving men four in hand!"

The old woman blinked her eyes and grunted unintelligibly.

"I'll wager you were a regular devil among the boys. I always have thought it!" accused the *torero,* in high spirits.

"*Cà!*" admitted the old woman, at last. "I'm afraid I did nearly drive your poor father out of his wits, Pancho. And there were several other fine fellows, too."

"I don't doubt it! I don't doubt it!" cried the *torero,* laughing loudly.

The old crone tipped her head to one side, and her wrinkles took a humorous twist at the memory of some ancient caprice of her youth.

"Still, I never wrote a note to a young man asking him to come to see me, Pancho. I never did such a shameless thing in all my life."

The son ignored the fact that his mother never knew how to write.

"*Caramba, madre,* a girl with a face like yours wouldn't have to write to anybody, unless it was to ask the young men to leave her alone."

Old Ana cleared her throat.

"Now, Pancho, you are laughing and trying to make sport, but"—she cleared her throat again—"that was exactly the way it was!"

XVI

In a cab, on his way to Paraiso, the bullfighter drew out Socorro's note, touched it to his lips, inhaled its faint perfume, and reread it in the last light of day. It was unbelievable—a note from a *señorita* in Paraiso! A note from the silent, beautiful girl whose image still haunted his *casa!* And now he was on his way to her villa at her request.

The fact that she had dishonored his cloak in the *circo* only a few hours before had now no status in his mind. Most people can forgive wrongs, but only lovers can forgive and utterly forget.

Angelito had his guitar with him in the cab. He had brought it along when making a call as naturally as he took a rapier to the bull ring. It was his custom as a peon. Now the feel of it under his hand, the rumor of music aroused in its bell by the jolting of the cab, evoked in the *torero* a mood of peculiar coloring which heightened his sense of triumph.

The faint sounds recalled his Matadero days, when he had used this same guitar before the barred windows of *muchachas* in the slaughterhouse slums. They were draggled, smelly purlieus. He had had to fight in those foul streets with other peon youths for the right to stand at the girls' windows. He recalled how he and his rivals butted with their heads, kicked with their feet and knees, and struck with the heels of their palms.

He recalled one fight vividly. His rival danced about in the dust, feinting this way and that with his head, his feet; but Angelito had leaped forward, his dirty head had crashed into the lad's belly, and down he went, while the winner kicked and stamped his prostrate foe. During this fight, the *muchacha* sat clutching the bars and peering out in silence.

Even now, as he refought this battle in the solitude of his cab, his heavy muscles tensed and flexed to the remembered action. In the midst of the conflict, he drew a deep breath of thankfulness.

"*Pues*, that was finished!"

Out of such obscene surroundings and feline courtships he had climbed to the decorum and amenities of Paraiso. He was a *caballero*. He would soon be in the presence of Socorro Jiminez. The thought sent a warm tingling through his whole body.

In the midst of this reverie his cab pulled up, and Angelito discovered that they had reached the tall iron fence of the Jiminez villa. He stepped out with the nimbleness of his profession. He had a feeling that he had ridden straight from his old Matadero days into Paraiso. He paid his fare. The driver turned his vehicle about and drove off.

Angelito walked slowly toward the Jiminez gate, holding his guitar by the neck. For the first time a doubt assailed him as to the propriety of the instrument. He was not sure that guitars were used by lovers in Paraiso. As he stood beside the iron gate, with its vertical bars reaching twice as high as his head, he touched the strings dubiously, sounding the strange, wailing harmonies in which the peons cast their music. The key was neither major nor minor, but a more melancholy sequence of intervals than either. Into this form had been poured the sorrows of the Venezuelan peon, whom for six hundred years the Spanish enslaved, ravished, and betrayed.

Angelito stood picking these mournful chords, and the sound somewhat reassured him, for he opened the gate and passed into the Jiminez grounds. As he walked in, the view of the shadowy villa set up another question in his mind. The house was so large that he did not know at just what window he would find Socorro.

He did not even think of ringing the doorbell. He had always gone to the window of his *querida* with his guitar, and that was what a call meant to him; but this villa had so many windows that it seemed certain he could never find Socorro at all.

Instinctively he deserted the main path and moved diagonally across the lawn, scanning each window in its turn. In some of them the last umber of the west glimmered like miniature sunsets; others were already black with the coming darkness.

The shadowy lawn was sweet with evening fragrances, and the air was full of those endless insect noises which compose the silence of a tropical night. It was a curiously complex orchestration—the thin, monotonous chirping of crickets, the sudden arpeggio of cicadas, the bombilation of beetles, the dry shrill of some insect's tiny plectrum, and the birdlike *ko-keet, ko-keet,* of the tropical frogs.

Immediately in front of him, over an acanthus bush, Angelito saw two great white moths dancing around and around each other in the purple air. As each one circled near him, he could hear the furry whisper of its wings. Which pursued or which evaded in their tireless spiraling, he could not tell. For a moment he stood watching the airy lovers caught in the whirl of some unimaginable ecstasy.

On a leaf of the acanthus glimmered a glowworm, like some wise virgin with her tiny lamp, awaiting the coming of her groom. Compared to the man on the lawn and the girl in the villa, these insect lovers were sundered by enormous distances, and their modes of courtship were infinitely tedious and complex—the glow of the worm, the circling of the moths, the clashing of plectra, and the wail of tiny pipes.

As Angelito moved about the villa amid this frail and passionate orchestra, he heard the distant notes of a piano. The sound sent a quiver of relief through the bullfighter's chest. He went quickly around the west wing of the villa, and presently, in one of the windows, he saw a yellow glow. By moving around a flowering shrub, he saw, through the bars, a girl seated at a piano, with a floor lamp beside her.

The richness of the ensemble and the beauty of the girl struck Angelito like a strain of music. A hope that the girl would come to the window and talk to him seemed a dream of impossible happiness.

He hardly knew Socorro. He had been accustomed to the severe apron in which she had nursed her brother. Now the white gleam of her arm through her slashed sleeve, her hair in shining black cables, her filmy *décolleté* gown, the sweet, smooth line that curved from her chin to the dimple at the base of her throat—all this filled Angelito with a kind of despairing ecstasy. It seemed impossible that such a girl could be friendly toward him. She seemed too—expensive. She was obviously reared to become the wife of some extensively wealthy man.

The bullfighter drew in his breath to call her, but the presumption of announcing himself to such a creature silenced him. He stood looking at her silently through the bars, and presently he became aware of the music she was making.

Socorro Jiminez had begun to play a piano transcription of Rimski-Korsakov's "Hymn to the Sun," from "The Golden Cockerel." Angelito had not the faintest idea what the composition was; nor, indeed, had he ever heard its like before. He stood listening to the sad, wistful melody with its delicately repeated cadenzas, and it seemed to him as if it were the meditation of the girl herself, so pensive, so exquisite, so vaguely ironic.

He stood listening with a beating heart, and presently there formed in his mind a possible accompaniment to the delicately spun melody. Looking fixedly at the girl, after the manner of a peon musician, he swung his guitar across his body, and his left fingers set themselves to the frets, moving up and down the neck of the guitar, changing positions in silence, with the sharp attack of a skillful player. After some half dozen changes in this mute accompaniment, he caught the exotic motif of the hymn. Then, with his eyes fixed steadily on the softly lighted figure at the piano, he struck his strings, and there arose a surprising harmony woven around the piano score.

At his first notes the girl at the instrument hesitated; but after a swift glance toward the window she continued playing, with the color mounting slowly to her face. Then, presently, it faded again, as she reentered the spell of the great Russian.

The strange melody filled Angelito's head with a kind of swimming delight. His fingers flew over the frets, following some instinct of their own. They wove ornaments and grace notes into the filigree of the music.

With this accompaniment, the girl at the piano passed swiftly into a new brilliance and passion of playing. The broken, half ironical pathos of Korsakov's melody, the little wistful, questioning runs, the mournful solemnity of the bass, filled the salon and the darkening garden.

The pianist played on and on to the last liquid double cadenza, which cascaded from treble to bass, and the final queries, following one another softly and hopelessly, until the last question is left unfinished, its final note unsounded.

The belly of Angelito's guitar still vibrated under his fingers when he became aware that the girl had risen from the piano and was coming toward the window. She passed the lamp, and became a lovely silhouette against its glow. Presently she seated herself in the window, so near Angelito that he caught the faint sweetness of her corsage.

"That is you, Señor Angel, is it not?" she said.

The bullfighter was so shaken that he could hardly answer.

"*Sí, señorita.* I received your compassionate note, *señorita.*"

"I did not know you played the guitar so beautifully. Where did you ever get a guitar transcription of the 'Hymn to the Sun'?"

Her voice was so inviting and lovely that Angelito felt an impulse to kneel before her, as he did to the saints in the cathedral.

"I never saw a transcription, *señorita.* Indeed, I know nothing about music. I play as I feel."

The girl peered at him attentively through the bars.

"*Señor,* it is amazing, to follow such an intricate composition!"

Socorro's admiration loosed some of the endless soliloquies Angelito had spun about the girl.

"*Señorita,*" he said intensely, "if I play at all acceptably, I owe it to you. Never before in all my life have I heard such sweetness as the air you played. It was like my thoughts of you, *señorita*—a kind of honeyed aching, a grieving for some celestial happiness that can never come in this life—at least, not to so humble a man as myself."

"*De verdad, señor!*" exclaimed the girl. "I thought you were a *torero*—I did not know you were also a musician and a poet!"

"I am merely a man who reads a poem, *señorita*. No man can look at you and not read a poem. If it did not come to his lips, it would rest in his heart."

"You are without shame," murmured the girl—"a sad flatterer and philanderer!"

The bullfighter stood gripping the bronze grille with both hands. He could hear the blood in his ears. He could see the pale blur of Socorro's fingers around one of the window bars, and instinctively he bent his lips to touch it.

"One does not flatter the moon by calling it lovely, *señorita*, nor the sun by declaring it bright. Although you never spoke to me in my *casa, señorita*, my heart danced to know you were there. When I played at dominoes in the cafés, I would suddenly think, 'I can go home and see her now!' It was like the sudden song of a bird."

Now an American girl would have seen in such hyperboles, and in this kissing of fingers, the sure signals of insincerity, for in the high latitudes passion is dumb, and its manifestations are rough; but the Latin, when aroused, boils into dithyrambs and florid gestures. A Spanish-American girl is as deeply moved by the fevered eloquence and deferential kisses of her lover as a North American girl would be by the most dangerous choking and sputtering. Socorro Jiminez was not disgusted with the bullfighter's inflated rhetoric. On the contrary, she was moved, and began to explain why she had remained so silent and distant during her stay at the blue *casa*.

"It was because I misunderstood you, *señor*," she said in an unsteady voice. "I have been sorry for it ever since. I thought you were the principal cause of Rafael's going to Valencia and getting wounded. I did not know, *señor*, I had no idea, that it was you who saved his life at the risk of your own!"

"*Caramba!*" cried the bullfighter. "Think of all the lovely hours we wasted just because you did not know that one little thing!"

His regret was so naïve that Socorro broke out laughing, and reached a hand through the bars to pat his arm.

"Anyhow, we know it now, *señor*, and the world is not ended yet!"

The bullfighter caught and kissed her hand again. The faint perfume of it set him trembling.

This second kiss ended that part of the interview rather abruptly, for she rose from the window seat, withdrew her hand, and said:

"Now you must go in and see Rafael. I know you are wanting to see him."

The bullfighter, at that moment, wanted to see Rafael about as much as he wanted to see a devil out of hell. From head to foot he vibrated like a harp string. He listened as Socorro directed him around to a side door, where she would admit him. Then she left the music room.

The night seemed to swing softly above Angelito. A quarter moon was in the sky, lodged, apparently, among the dark branches of a mamon tree. In its glimmer the white moths still whirled in their dance above the acanthus bush.

It seemed to Angelito that the glamour of the night somehow cut him off from Socorro. The very moonlight was a sort of pale, impalpable wall barring him from her. Hemmed in, as it were, by a moving prison, he walked to the side door. He knew that in a few moments he would be inside the house, talking to Rafael, and also, no doubt, to the coldly polite *señora*. Socorro would be lost to him in the vacuity of formal conversation.

Rather unexpectedly, the door opened, and the girl stepped out beside him for an instant. She paused to draw a breath of the perfume.

"It's a sweet night, *señor*," she said.

Angelito sought to delay her.

"You have so many flowers here, *señorita*, it is like the fields of flowers the peons grow up in the mountains."

"Yes—I have seen them. They are very beautiful."

"And they grow the rarest varieties," the bullfighter wandered on, hardly knowing what he said. "Lilies and orchids—"

"If you are interested in orchids," exclaimed Socorro impulsively, "we have a very rare one out there in the garden, Señor Angel. It is one Rafael found up in the

Goajira country. It is pale blue, and fragrant only at night."

The implication that she was about to show him an orchid in the garden flowed through the *torero* with a sensation of warm wine being poured into his veins. He said in an unsteady voice that he wished above all things to see the orchid.

She took his arm, and together they turned out into the moonlight.

The extreme unconventionality of such a walk seized and shook Angelito. At every step he trembled lest the girl should turn and go back. Then, as she went on, he began to realize that she was as deeply moved as he himself. It seemed impossible. How could a *señorita* so finished, so exquisite, be stirred by him?

He heard her give a little intake of breath.

"What is it, *señorita?*"

He trembled, terrified lest repentance had set in. She gave a little nervous laugh.

"*Señor,* your arm might be a bronze arm off a statue."

He felt the faint pressure of her fingers on his biceps.

"That came from fighting, *señorita,*" he said huskily.

"You must be terribly strong!"

The bullfighter made a deprecatory movement of his hand, which caused his arm to swell and relapse under her finger tips.

After a little pause she said:

"You made me very happy this afternoon, *señor,* throwing your cloak to me in the arena."

A reminiscent pain arose in the bullfighter's heart.

"I thought I would find you there when I came back after it, *señorita.*"

The girl gave a gasp and looked at him, her eyes two dark spots in the moonlight.

"Oh, I went off and left your coat on the balustrade!"

Angelito made a gesture.

"It was nothing, *señorita.*"

"But it *was* something—it was indeed! Did you get it back?"

The *torero* tried to dismiss the topic.

"A man threw it to me."

"A man! What must the man have thought?"

"I don't know, *señorita*—nothing, perhaps. It was such a trifle."

The girl pressed his arm to accent her point.

"But it was not a trifle! It was rude. I—we—we had some trouble in our box, *señor*—a little accident. That's why I left the cloak."

"Did it happen to you?" asked the *torero,* in the exaggerated alarm of lovers.

"*Pues*—yes."

"What could it have been?"

The girl hesitated.

"Just a trifle. I—I grew ill. I'm afraid I fainted."

For some reason Angelito's heart began beating at this confession. Her weakness appealed to his immense strength. Impulsively he put his hand on her arm, as if to give her some kind of retroactive support.

"But how came you to faint, *señorita?*" he asked anxiously. "Were you ill?"

This man's concern for her moved Socorro in the most intimate fashion. She had not meant to tell him why she fainted, and yet it became utterly impossible not to do so. His hand on her arm seemed to be softly melting something within her.

"I—I hardly know, *señor,*" she hesitated. "I saw you standing alone in the arena. I—I thought how Rafael had been gored, and somehow I fainted."

"Oh, on account of Rafael!"

Socorro wanted to let that go, but it seemed as if she were practicing some monstrous deception on him. Her bosom lifted and fell. She was trembling all over.

"No, *señor,*" she whispered. "I was afraid you would be gored."

"Me?"

She nodded mutely. She seemed about to fall.

"You fainted on my account?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she breathed, letting herself go into his groping arms, resting her devastating weakness on his powerful muscles. Her senses were in confusion. She instinctively resisted his hand, which he slipped under her chin to turn her face to his.

"No, don't—don't do that!" she gasped.

She was supported by his arms, and by leaning against his body. She did not know why she wanted to delay or refuse his kiss.

Angelito held her as carefully as if a priest had intrusted him with the holy chrism. She was slighter than he had thought, and amazingly soft. He had never before placed a hand on a girl bred and reared for the express purpose of becoming the wife of a wealthy man.

The peon women, of whom he had known

enough, were tough and rubbery. Socorro was as surprising as his first draft of absinth. He wanted to pick her up bodily, to press her against his breast, but he was exceedingly careful of her, and a little afraid lest he might somehow hurt her exquisite delicateness.

There was a stone bench near them, and they got to it. As he sat holding her, it was all a blank mystery to him. He could not understand her amazing capitulation. She was obviously a *señorita,* a carefully guarded and perfectly innocent girl. He did not understand the persuasiveness of his weeks of mute wooing in his own *casa,* the pathos of his unfortunate dinner, the romantic force of the dangers he met in the arena.

After an uncertain interval, they began whispering about the last subject which had engaged their thoughts — Socorro's fainting at the Nuevo Circo. She had never done such a thing before. She supposed that this must be love, but it was not what she had expected. What she had expected she hardly knew, but something different, in some way.

As she murmured these things, her head rested on his chest, and she could hear his heart whispering in her ear. Her eyes fixed themselves on the crescent moon hung in the mamon tree. It seemed as if all anxiety and suspense and weariness had been drawn out of her mind and body forever. She had never experienced so profound a rest.

Presently Angelito leaned down and kissed her, but it scarcely rippled her crystalline mood, his caress seemed so normal.

Socorro had a curious impression that somehow the man and the night had changed places. It had seemed at first that Angelito was her lover, and the night a sweet and ambient setting. Now Angelito's arms and body were the setting which enabled Socorro to see, for the first time in her life, how sweet and beautiful was the tropical night.

Heretofore the beauty of the night had filled her with a sort of wistful sweetness. Now its light and perfume showered upon her in a sort of fulfilled sweetness. For this hour she and Angelito and the ancient night existed.

XVII

THE girl felt the bullfighter move and then lift her gently to one side. A sharp sense of alarm went through her. She became aware of two dark figures standing within a few yards of the bench. She gave a little gasp as she stared at them. She stopped a scream in her throat. She had a convulsive impulse to run. One of the figures was her brother; the other—the smaller of the two—was Señor Montaúban.

She had a sensation as if she were sinking through space. She fell and fell and fell. The two figures sank with her. She felt hot, then intensely cold.

She saw Angelito get up and advance toward the two men. Something in his walk gave her a terrible fear that he would attack the two men, perhaps would kill them.

She heard Rafael's voice, amazed and bewildered:

"Socorro—sister—is that you?"

Señor Montauban immediately interrupted in a strained tone:

"A lovely night, *señorita!*"

Socorro made an effort to speak, and heard a strange voice saying for her:

"I brought Señor Angel out here to see that blue orchid."

Angelito, from his experience in Matadero courtships, was expecting every moment a personal assault from the editor. Now he began to perceive that none was coming. He wondered if it were possible that the two men had not seen him sitting with Socorro in his arms, but the tone of their voices denied this merciful possibility.

He turned to Socorro, and included the whole company.

"Shall we go into the house, *señorita?* I wish to pay my respects to the Señora Jiminez."

But no sooner had he mentioned the *señora* than he realized that of all persons he most dreaded meeting her.

"I am sorry I can't go with you," said the editor, in his strained manner. "I was just going. I will say good night."

He bowed, and all the other three repeated his good night in unnatural voices. He turned toward the gate, and was lost in the veil of moonlight.

As Rafael turned once more toward the house, he said in his strange voice:

"Narciso and I were growing uneasy about you, Socorro. We heard you go out into the garden some time ago. It was growing late."

Angelito was becoming more terrified every moment at the prospect of meeting the *señora.* He seized on this as an excuse.

"Perhaps I'd better wait till later to see the *señora,*" he said.

Socorro gripped his arm.

"Don't leave me!" she whispered desperately, but the very next moment she went on: "Yes, yes, *madre de Dios,* go at once!"

Rafael, who had started to enter by the side door, turned back at Angelito's suggestion.

"No—come on in, *señor,*" he insisted, with a certain determination in his tone. "My mother will want to see you, and no doubt you will want to say something concerning my sister."

"Oh, Rafael!" gasped Socorro, and suddenly dropped the *torero's* arm.

Angelito felt as if unknown depths were opening beneath his feet.

"Your sister," he repeated vacantly.

He dimly realized that he would have to make a declaration to the mother, asking for Socorro in marriage. Rafael stood holding the door open for the two to enter.

As Angelito walked toward the drawing-room, he realized the futility of possessing such muscles as his amid polite society. It profited him nothing to be strong enough to toss Rafael out of the house and to bind the women with one hand. It had even been out of the question to assault Señor Montauban in the garden, although the idea did pass through his head.

Rafael limped slowly through a corridor and across a *patio* to a lighted room. Angelito and Socorro followed. There was nothing that the bullfighter could do to soften or forestall the coming interview.

Rafael opened a door and stood aside to admit his two companions, not to say prisoners, into a large room filled with a rose-colored light. The Señora Jiminez was at a table, placidly weaving lace on a pillow stuck full of pins. On the other side Margarita Miraflores crocheted so rapidly that her needle was a blur of flashes.

At the entrance of the party, both ladies looked up. At the sight of Angelito, they stopped work in surprise.

"It's Señor Angel!" cried Margarita, jumping up. "How kind of you to come to see us!"

The *señora* was cooler.

"Won't you have a seat, Señor Angel?" she invited, staring at him in surprise.

Rafael cleared his throat.

"Angelito—I mean Señor Angel—desires to present his respects to you, *maman,*" said the young man of the house, with preternatural seriousness; "and he would like to speak to you concerning Socorro."

The *señora's* surprise grew into extreme amazement.

"Socorro! He—he would like to speak to me about Socorro! What is there that he can say about Socorro?"

"*Pues,* there are not a great many topics on which a young man can speak to a mother about her daughter," returned Rafael dryly.

The *señora* looked about the group.

"Rafael, are you insane? Socorro, what is your brother saying?"

For the first time she looked at Socorro, and the girl's face frightened her.

"*Mi hija!*" she cried. "Are you ill? How white you look! What does this mean, Señor Angelito? What can it possibly be that you want to say to me?"

Angelito moistened his lips nervously and stammered:

"I—I want to ask your permission to—to pay my addresses to your daughter."

"Your addresses! *Addresses!* A bullfighter pay his addresses to my daughter!" She had grown as pale as the girl. "*Señor,* I do not wish to appear rude under my own roof, but you must realize that this is effrontery. It is—"

"*Madre,*" interposed Rafael quickly, "I must tell you that Socorro has already dismissed Narciso's suit in favor of Señor Angel."

"Socorro! Am I going demented? You dismissed Narciso—Narciso Montauban?"

"Only five minutes ago, *madre.* Narciso and I found them seated in the garden together, on the stone bench."

"Alone?"

Rafael made a gesture.

"*Dios in cielo!*" gasped the matron. "Has Socorro disgraced herself — at her age?" She turned furiously on the bullfighter. "You serpent! You intriguing peon butcher! Leave my house! Go!"

She gave Angelito the impression that she was about to annihilate him through mere spiritual wrath.

Margarita stared at her friend, gasping vacantly.

"Socorro! No—this is impossible!" she cried.

Rafael made a harassed gesture.

"*Caramba,* don't be gasping and insulting every one like that, *maman!* This is a condition to be faced, not something to exclaim over. I tell you Narciso Montauban has gone."

Margarita spoke again.

"Socorro! To throw over the whole Montauban estate!"

"The question is," pressed Rafael, in polite exasperation, "shall we accept Señor Angel in Narciso's stead? At present no one knows of Socorro's indiscretion in the garden, except Narciso and Angelito and ourselves."

"*Por l'amor de Cristo,* Rafael!" cried the *señora.* "Don't be calling him 'Señor Angelito.' Call him by his proper name, Señor Angel."

"Señor Angel? His name is not Señor Angel!"

"In the name of Heaven, what is it, then? Narciso said it was."

"I—don't know," said Rafael blankly.

"What is it, *hombre?*" demanded the *señora,* turning fiercely on the fighter. "What is your name?"

Her attack was so abrupt that the *torero* had a dazzled sensation, as if some one had struck him in the face. He was forced to answer immediately, without a moment's forecast of the consequences.

"I am Pancho Pachecho, *señora,*" he stammered hurriedly.

"Pancho Pachecho!"

"*Sí, señora,*" he answered in an apprehensive tone.

"Pancho Pachecho!" Suddenly she began to laugh. "A Jiminez marrying a Pachecho!" She broke into a rage of laughter. "*Mi hija,* do you hear that? A *bribon* named Pancho Pachecho is asking me for your hand!"

"*Caramba,* that's nothing to have hysterics over, *madre!*" cried Rafael. "I could have told you it was something like that. The man naturally has a name!" He turned to Angelito. "Señor Pachecho, you see my mother is overwrought. I will call at your *casa* in the morning with her answer to your request. Until then I wish you *adios.*"

He bowed as gracefully as his lame leg would permit. Angelito returned the courtesy, and then, glancing anxiously at Socorro, he said:

"*Señora, señoritas,* good night."

Socorro's lips made a movement of farewell in her perfectly white face.

A thought came to Angelito that he was now seeing his last of the girl he loved. With all his strength and suppleness, there was no way in which he could brush this angry family away and take her. They had him bound and trussed with the invisible thongs of social custom. His huge strength was no match for them at all.

As he crossed the *patio,* and went out of the side entrance, he realized that he had lost her.

XVIII

When her lover had well departed, Socorro walked over to a sofa, sat down on it, and said:

"Now—begin!"

"Socorro, what can you see in that hulking creature? A bullfighter, a peon tossed up by the *circo!* How could you, how could we, have the effrontery to announce such an engagement to our friends here in Caracas?"

"But, *maman,*" interposed Rafael, "that is not the question now. Remember that Socorro was sitting in the garden with him, alone, at midnight!"

"But, Rafael, no one knows it but us and Narciso," Margarita interrupted.

"Doesn't that villainous bullfighter know it?" cried the *señora.* "Do you imagine he will fail to spread news of his conquest in the wine shops?"

"Oh, *madre!*" cried Socorro, with a sick face.

"He will, of course he will!" insisted the *señora,* amazed at her daughter's belief in her lover. "Socorro, you don't know such creatures. They don't understand — they simply do not understand the code of aristocrats. I don't doubt that at this moment he is telling some brother peon of sitting in a garden with a *señorita.* Is that all you did—just sit there with him?" She turned quickly to her son. "Was that all she did, Rafael?"

"Oh, *maman,* you were a girl once! You know about how a girl in love acts."

"Socorro!" cried the distracted mother. "How could you be so shameless? You are as bad as the North American *señoritas* who permit—anything!"

"Socorro, you might at least have stayed behind your bars," reproached Margarita, in a tone which suggested that much could be accomplished, even behind bars.

"Yes," declared Rafael, in a dry voice, "you might surely have stayed behind your bars, Socorro. Innocence is a technical matter, and should be observed like the eating of fish on Friday."

Señora Jiminez looked at her son.

"Rafael, I hope you don't mean that you are condoning your sister's conduct?"

"*Cà!* It has its other side, *maman.* Everything has its other side."

"Other side! What other sides are there but shamelessness, disgracefulness, and scandal? There'll be oceans of gossip about this, Socorro—you may rest sure of that!"

Socorro made no reply, but sat looking anxiously at her brother. Rafael hesitated at being thus appealed to. Possibly he might not have entered the lists at all, had not Socorro spoken for his patronage. He cleared his throat.

"After all, *maman,*" he said, "Socorro has a certain—well, a certain justification, when one comes really to look at it."

The mother at once turned her attention to Rafael.

"A certain justification?" she repeated, amazed.

"Yes, her action shows, I think I may say, a certain return to fundamentals."

Margarita was staring at him.

"Rafael, what are you talking about?"

"I am talking about Socorro and Señor Angelito. To me, their sudden and passionate attraction for each other has in it something fundamentally healthful, and I may even say beautiful."

"Rafael," frowned his mother, "surely you are not going to fling out any ill timed philosophy, when your sister's honor is in question and your family is in trouble? This is no time for philosophy!"

The young man hesitated. Margarita cried out:

"Let him go on, just to see what he will say!"

Came a little hesitation, and Rafael again caught Socorro's eye.

"It's just this," he began self-consciously, since his remarks were clearly to be taken as an exhibition of fantastic nonsense. "It's just this. I wanted to say—er—that all aristocracies are eventually refined away to impotence." He collected what he had thought on the subject by main force of memory. "They breed along one strain—aristocracies do, I mean—until that strain becomes so exaggerated that it can no longer withstand the shocks of existence. An aristocracy, such as ours, becomes overcerebrated, has too much nerves and too little brawn, too much convention and not enough impulse. This—er—this affair of Socorro's is her natural impulse to return to first principles. Her children will be—er—stronger and in better equilibrium for it, and I honor her for it."

Margarita and the *señora* listened to this salmagundi of big words without any patience at all.

"You mean that you honor Socorro for dishonoring herself?"

"I think, *maman,* that when her love impulse is strong enough to make her overstep our conventions, it is a very hopeful sign," returned the poet brusquely.

"Why, that's absurd and irreverent!" cried the mother. "You make a virtue of wrongdoing!"

"Wrongdoing!" cried Rafael. "Wrong is what reduces one's chances of perpetuating one's self, and right is what forwards those ends. Now, in this instance—"

"Rafael," cried his mother, "I am ashamed of you talking such nonsense and wickedness in this hour of trouble!"

"*Cà!* There is really no use discussing it. Let's drop it. The only question is, what is the best thing to do under the circumstances? Socorro was seen sitting in the garden with Angelito. All there is left for us to do is to accept the fellow, and have the banns published."

Señora Jiminez suddenly began weeping.

"Sacred Virgin, that is the only sensible thing you have said! It is too true—Socorro has disgraced herself. She will have to say many a prayer for this! To have my family disgraced by such a marriage!"

The *señora* sat down by the table, sobbing helplessly, and dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

Margarita went over to her future mother-in-law, and took her hands, sniffing back her own sobs.

"M-margarita," gasped the *señora,* "I don't suppose you will w-want to enter a disgraced family, es-especially when y-your future husband holds such wicked and irreligious views!"

"Oh, th-they aren't Rafael's v-views," sobbed Margarita. "H-he d-doesn't bub-believe what he says. I don't think he knows what he believes!"

Here she joined her mother-in-law in sobbing outright.

"That is very charitable, Margarita," murmured the *señora,* pressing her daughter-in-law's hands.

Rafael heard himself classified as a moron and forgiven by Margarita. He shrugged faintly, and glanced at his sister. Socorro's expression seemed to show disappointment. He shrugged again privately, to himself. Finally he said:

"*Pues,* what shall I tell this Señor Pachecho to-morrow—that it's all right?"

"If you do," choked the *señora,* "it will be on your own responsibility as the head of this house. I will have nothing whatever to do with it!"

This, of course, meant that the *señora* was giving her consent. The poet limped to his mother's side and patted her cheek.

"After all, *maman,*" he said gently, "this won't work out so badly. If you and Margarita could see the matter from my point of view, it might make you feel more comfortable."

As the young man drew away from them, Margarita reached up and let her hands drag down his arms.

"Good night, Rafael!" she said wistfully.

"Good night," returned the poet.

As he went out of the door into the *patio,* toward his own room, he heard his mother begin again.

"Socorro, I simply cannot see what you find in such a creature! Why, he doesn't look like a man—he looks like a sort of bull, as if he had taken his figure from the animals he butchers!"

(*To be continued in the March number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE GARDEN OF SLEEP

In an old book I read far through the night,
Then blew my candle out, for morn was near,
And slept and dreamed a dream of strange delight—
That in a garden I walked with her most dear,
And she was young again, and I was young,
And the old flowers were there, and the birds we knew
Sang the old happy, unforgotten song,
And all the long-lost joy was fresh with dew,
As ever we said to each other, "I and you."

Her little gown of dimity she wore,
With tiny sprigs of jasmine patterned quaint;
And oh, she seemed—so bright a light did pour
From her pure brows—sweet shining as some saint
That bends above a young knight at his prayers.
The fragrance of immortal presences
Streamed from her sweeter than the garden airs,
Or any nard or earthly essences,
As we walked on amid the blossoming trees.

Oh, blessèd power of sleep to immortalize,
As in a magic glass, the things that were
Fadeless in bloom for closed, unquestioning eyes
That still may see old fairness ever fair,
Young dawns that never on to noontide drew,
But kept forever their enchanted morn,
New moons in the high pine tops ever new,
Love in the holy hush when it was born
Forever tranced, and laughing time to scorn!

What though the day brings back a moaning wind
Within the heart, and shows the years grown gray,
And wakened eyes perceive how lone and thinned
The garden boughs, and all things fled away
That were so near and warm a moment's space;
What though that little gown of dimity
Is dust, and dust forever is that face,
And we have lost our garden, I and she—
While sleep to that lost garden holds the key?

Richard Le Gallienne

The Little Green Model

THE TRUTH ABOUT CERTAIN SCANDALOUS PROCEEDINGS AT LACUS COLLEGE

By Dawn Powell

IT was Kay Fielding's ingenuous habit to doze gently throughout Psychology Four. Even though it was the last class on the afternoon of the Junior Promenade, she was not sufficiently excited to alter her napping hour.

She lounged dreamily in a chair at the back of the room, where the drifting afternoon sunshine made of her sandy hair a mop of beauty, and gave a wistful charm to her gallant little mouth and her small, inquiring face. She was absorbed in some far-off planet while here about her burned one of the big, vital discussions that Miss Blythe loved to stage in order to " draw the girls out."

" Yes, the morality of falsehood." Miss Blythe's cheery voice filtered disagreeably through Kay's trance. " Now, Miss Terrell, just what do we mean by a falsehood?"

Miss Terrell, who always led the honor roll at the end of the year by being an Eager Eye, sparkled with sweet intensity into the professor's eyes. Kay looked away, but she knew that Miss Terrell was sitting on the edge of her seat, vibrating with thrills over the lecture. All through the period, Kay felt sure, she had been writing frantically in her notebook.

It was generally understood among the faculty that copious note taking showed the true scholarly nature, and incidentally betrayed a flattering confidence in the teacher's wisdom. Miss Terrell, therefore, took voluminous notes; and when the professor repeated some phrase, she smiled knowingly and carefully underlined said phrase in her notebook. She had smiled sympathetically with the teacher when some student had missed a nuance, and now and then she had gently interpolated:

" I think, Miss Blythe, that what Miss Jones means to say is—"

Kay had never been an Eager Eye, and, as a consequence, she usually carried a subject from one year to the next. She had often felt that if she had been allowed to choose her own subjects, she might have distinguished herself academically; but Lacus College had the customary institutional policy of keeping the student as far as possible from the courses in which he might have a natural interest.

Miss Terrell, as Kay might have guessed, gave every indication of struggling with a thought too vast for expression.

" I think "—she finally uttered gropingly, and hesitated. " Why, I think—it seems to me that a falsehood is—at least, it seems so to me—practically the same thing as telling a lie."

" Ye-es," said Miss Blythe appreciatively, but determined to get the full value from the word. " What does it seem to you, Miss Freese?"

" I don't know just how to express it," Miss Freese contributed winningly; " but I feel that a person could hardly tell a lie without being insincere, if you know what I mean."

" Exactly," nodded Miss Blythe, with an air of really getting somewhere. " Now, Miss Freese, is a lie ever justifiable?"

" It would depend "—cunningly—" on the circumstances."

" Well, now, supposing a murderer came along and asked you which way his victim had gone, and you knew, should you tell him the truth? What do you think, Miss Fielding?"

" Blah, blah," answered Kay, still in a trance.

" Miss Fielding?"

" I said," said Kay, " that I certainly would."

The bell rang for the close of the period, and Kay seized her untidy and barren notes and ran out before the professor could pursue the fascinating subject further. Miss Blythe's gaze followed the fleeing student with thoughtful suspicion, so that she neglected to heed the shy question concerning falsehood which Miss Terrell had paused to ask personally.

Kay hurried to the elevator with the outpouring groups from the other classrooms. Lora Duffield, another self-supporting student, was running the elevator. She showed Kay, with a grimace, the bleeding cuts on her hand where the elevator rope—it was an old hydraulic car—had bruised her palm. The car filled with noisy girls, and started downward.

"Scourge is looking for you," hissed Lora in Kay's ear. At the same time she stopped the car at the third floor to scream out: "Third floor — ladies' underwear, Panama hats, rubber heels, and gentlemen's handkerchiefs with the initial I! Going down!"

"The Scourge," calmly answered Kay, turning her freckled snub nose loftily skyward, "gives me a pain. Got a man for prom, Lora?"

"Miss Gage got me the Town Boy," grinned Lora.

She referred to a fat bachelor who seemed to be the only eligible man the town had produced for a decade, and who had received a classification all his own.

At the street floor the girls poured out. Kay hurried over to the dormitory, trying to put her thoughts on anything but the Junior Promenade. To think of prom made her head throb with indignation, for she was the only girl in the class who could not go, and all because of the Scourge.

She tried to summon a smile at the thought of how the seniors, for whom the whole college had a profound contempt, would behave at prom. It was a poor attempt, however, and she was suffused with self-pity and her own small tragedy until she reached her room. Claire Paige, her roommate, and Tacky Freese were there, getting their gowns in readiness, for in another two hours the men would begin to arrive.

"Kay, what do you think?" greeted Claire, pink and excited over the business of being junior president and in charge of the great man-event of the year. "The seniors have been all dressed since lunch, and have gathered in their classroom to sing the dear 'Alma Mater.' Wouldn't that sicken you?"

"The grand old seniors!" jeered Kay. "If that isn't just like them! They belong to another age, Claire. I'll bet they're up there now telling one another that it ain't so much the diploma—it's the associations you form."

Which was probably very near the truth. The graduating class belonged to an old régime, and was as unpopular as any that had ever been sent into the great world from Lacus College. They had preserved the antique custom of singing college songs in a deep, full, resonant manner, instead of humming or mumbling the things as they should be done. They had class parties. They abounded with class spirit, college spirit, Drama Club spirit, Shakespeare Club spirit, and other spirits of an aggravating nature.

"Only four of them had men they could ask to prom," sneered Claire, delicately "bobbing her eyebrows," as it was called, before the mirror. "The rest came to me and hired their escorts, or else asked their own brothers."

She flipped the tweezers back into the drawer.

"I'd like to know," meditated Kay, "just what your men friends would say if they knew the graft you work with them. I see the thing in the women's magazines—'How One Girl Put Herself Through College by Renting Her Men Friends to Friendless Classmates.'"

"I've made quite a bit," admitted Claire shamelessly. "Dad would have a fit if he knew—that is, unless it struck him in the right mood."

Tacky Freese sat at the foot of the bed on which Kay had thrown herself, and manicured her nails passionately.

"What are you going to wear, Kay? Some little Jenny number?"

"I'm not going," answered Kay. "The only thing I've got to wear is a dainty little dimity shirt waist and a white linen skirt, and they're dirty. In fact, they've been dirty ever since freshman year, when I wore them at the May festival."

"Kay, you've got to come," Claire implored, now engaged with her brown, wavy hair. "You're the most important person there. Tacky, she had the loveliest toasts made up. The dean said the junior president ought to do them, but you know I can't, so I told her it was an old tradition in the college that the junior president's roommate should be toastmistress. It worked, too. You know how scared she is of upsetting our traditions."

"Well, why isn't Kay going to prom?" pursued Tacky, looking from one to the other.

"It's the Scourge," gloomily explained Kay, adjusting the cushions behind her. "She told me I was never to borrow clothes from any one again. She said it was a vile, vulgar habit, and quite worthy of me, but if I did it again she'd write my folks and have me expelled. That was after she met me on the way to that Phi Gam house party in town, wearing Claire's gray suit. Of course, I had planned to wear Claire's yellow taffeta, and Claire had got me a man and everything."

"I might have known the Scourge was at the bottom of it!" growled Tacky, frowning over an infinitesimal speck on her thumb nail. "It's a wonder she didn't make you wear one of her little models—the green velvet one, for instance."

The Scourge, whose real name was Miss Ellen Thomas, was famous for a complete wardrobe of 1890 costumes, which she wore with as much of an air as if they had been hot from Hickson's, as Kay put it. It was a tradition of the place that in the spring of 1911 the Scourge had purchased a linen suit of that period, but had only worn it once, doubtless saving it for the latter part of the century. For the most part she wore bell-shaped sleeves, tight bodices, high collars, and voluminous circular skirts.

She was sister to the former president of the board of trustees, and on the strength of that she had bullied the faculty, the students, the president, the dean, and even the janitor, for thirty years. Indeed, the old dean had left on her account, and the new one—a fragile, adorable little thing called Miss Greenleaf — was intimidated by her airs. The Scourge was still a factor in the Science Department, and it was Kay's painful duty, as a self-supporting student, to help her in the laboratory for four hours every day.

"Not the green velvet one, Tacky," answered Kay. "I couldn't endure that. It has too many depressing associations."

From the floor above familiar strains were gently borne abroad:

"Faithful, loyal, true—stately paths—fondest memories—Alma Mater dear—ivy-covered—faithful, loyal, true will be—"

Kay snorted.

"Hokum!" she announced, and jumped to her feet.

"Where to?" queried Claire, biting a thread.

"Got to clean up some test tubes and feed the frogs and chameleons and other museum pieces," answered Kay. "That's one thing about me, girls—I do love my work. One of these days I'm going to dynamite the science works, and the Scourge may be missed. I'll be back in time to sew you in, Claire. If my man arrives before Margie finds out she's to take him, you break the news to both of them."

"Kay, you'll do something about the toasts, won't you?" pleaded Claire. "Make notes on a handkerchief, and give it to Tacky."

Kay nodded and went out. In the hall underclassmen clustered in ecstatic anticipation of the great event of the year.

"Miss Fielding isn't even bathed," she heard an awed freshman whisper. "All the seniors have been ready all day!"

II

Kay told herself that it wasn't going to be very nice sticking in the dormitory all evening, while everybody else was over in Recreation Hall, dancing. Claire had furnished her with a very dashing man from her Princeton group. He thought he was going to take Claire. In fact, all of Claire's men thought that; but Claire always prettily disillusioned them when they arrived.

Kay opened the front door, but started back to make way for a beaming, brown-faced young man in tweeds, who was just entering. He swept off his hat. On seeing his sleek black hair, Kay gasped bewilderedly. She knew this man, she was positive, and yet—

"Fitzy!" she ejaculated delightedly, and fairly hugged him in her excitement. "Where did you come from? And did you get through your bar examinations?"

There was a shade of startled wonder in the young man's face, but Kay did not note it till afterward.

"Perfect!" he said. "And how—er—is everything all right?"

"Oh, tell me, are you going to take that New York offer, or practice in your home town?"

"New York," answered Fitzy, never taking his puzzled eyes from Kay's small, freckled face.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Kay. "Do you know I didn't hear that you were coming to prom?"

"Prom? Good Lord, is this prom week?"

Fitzy stared distressfully at Kay. Just then Kay saw the Scourge beckoning to her from the steps of the Science Building, and she fled, with a jolly smile for the bewildered young man.

"Now who under the sun—" pondered the young man, studying her retreating figure.

As for Kay, she had almost reached the Scourge's side before she realized that the young man whom she had welcomed so warmly was an utter stranger. True, he was Fitzy, and she knew all about him from Claire, but having his picture on your roommate's dresser and hearing about him continually for three years gave scant justification for greeting him with the next thing to a kiss.

"Why are you blushing?" demanded the Scourge.

The new dean was with the Scourge, and Kay looked at her appealingly.

"Miss Fielding needs more color, I think," said the dean graciously. "She spends so much time in the laboratory and the classroom that I fear she doesn't get enough air and exercise."

It turned the Scourge's attention for a moment, and Kay had an instant to reflect, with shame, on the frightful error she had just committed.

"I almost kissed him!" she mused. "I'll have Claire explain that I'm a little ignorant, and haven't read the 'Book of Etiquette.'"

"You're going to prom, of course, Katherine?" asked the Scourge, fixing her fishy gray eyes on the sandy-haired girl before her.

Kay fidgeted. She wished that her four hours' work in the laboratory was all she had to account to the Scourge for. Instead of just that, she had to explain every guest she had, every deviation from her usual coiffure, her taste in clothes, her absence at chapel, and a million other things.

"No, Miss Thomas, I can't," she answered in a low voice.

The Scourge drew back, scandalized. Her huge sleeves bristled, and she placed a skinny brown hand over her tight bosom dramatically.

"Just why, Katherine, may I ask?"

Kay wriggled in her green smock and arranged a falsely ingenuous smile on her face. If she didn't make this effort, she was likely—so Claire had told her—to present a white, terrified face whenever the Scourge addressed her.

"You see I have no evening dress, and you forbade me to borrow," she said.

"Certainly, I forbade you to borrow," boomed the Scourge righteously. "It is an abominable custom, and—"

"Girls will do it," murmured the dean apologetically. "I always did."

The Scourge ignored this.

"And as I told you before, Katherine, I shan't promise to be lenient next time I find you out promenading in borrowed plumes. You see, Miss Greenleaf, the girls of the better families loan their gowns, and then the parents write to us complaining of it. Katherine is inclined to take advantage of her friends of superior social position, and naturally their parents protest. Poor little Miss Paige — the pretty little junior president, you know, daughter of Ex-Governor Paige—has befriended Katherine, and has tried to ignore certain social barriers, and Katherine has, I am afraid, taken advantage of it."

Kay turned an unbecoming shade of henna, as she always did to the Scourge's benign insinuations that the Fielding family was of lower status than most.

"As if," she told herself fiercely, "an inventor father wasn't as good as a Governor father!"

The dean looked apprehensively at Kay.

"I don't think Katherine's morals are affected by her borrowing habits," she smiled.

The Scourge studied Kay for an instant.

"I must say I am disappointed at your lack of class spirit in not supporting these college activities," she said ponderously. "I see no reason why you should not go. Naturally you cannot dress as well as Miss Paige, or Miss Freese, or some of the others with wealthier connections, but no one expects it of you. I insist that you show your loyalty by attending the affair to-night. Since it's a matter of dress, I myself will make you a gift of a dress. You may come with me now. You will excuse us, Miss Greenleaf?"

Kay's heart stopped for a moment. She had a wild desire to rush back to her room and announce that she was going to wear one of the Scourge's "little models."

She walked along to the Faculty House numbly, wondering just which atrocity it would be. She thought of suicide as the only way out. Once the Scourge presented her with the dress, she would have to wear it or be prepared to have her means of support withdrawn. The Scourge would immediately discharge her from the Science Laboratory, and the other berths for self-supporting students were all taken. It would amount to expulsion.

" But, Miss Thomas, you see I've given away my man," gently protested Kay, as they neared what was known as the Execution Chamber—in other words, Miss Thomas's bedroom.

" Nonsense! If you were so foolish, you must go alone, then. I'm sure no one will mind your having no escort."

The Scourge opened the bedroom door. A smell of must and moth balls met the nostrils. Kay stood silently waiting while the Scourge disappeared in her closet and emerged with a green velveteen dress, redolent of moth balls, its plaid silk sleeves billowing from the waist, and its skirt weighty with a thousand ruffles, pleatings, inner linings, and lead pieces.

Kay actually sagged when the Scourge placed it in her arms.

" Thank you, Miss Thomas," she said faintly.

" It's a little old-fashioned," admitted the Scourge generously; " but the color will become you. And as I said to the dean, it's not fitting that self-supporting students should dress as elaborately as the other girls. One likes to feel that the people one helps really need it. I shall be anxious to see you to-night, and to see how the dress looks on you. I had intended giving it to some one. In fact, I had spoken to Bridget about it, but I'm sure she won't mind. Well, good night, Katherine. You'll have to hurry. I see the seniors are dressed already, and the young men have begun to arrive."

" Thank—" gulped Kay again.

" And by the way, Katherine, at the first opportunity I want to speak to you about your plans for the summer. A wealthy friend of the college has offered to let one of the students be her cook this summer, at good wages, and I suggested you, although I didn't know how well you could cook. We'll talk of that another time."

" Thinks I'm in the Bridget class!" sniffed Kay angrily, hurrying back to her room, fearful lest some one should see her bearing the famous " little model." She was unsuccessful in her attempts to hide it, however. Just as she reached her door, a sophomore squealed out:

" Oh, Kay, are you going to do a stunt in the Scourge's dress?"

Kay nodded briefly and burst into the room. Claire and Tacky were fastening each other up, and Kay had a chance to thrust the dress under her bed before they looked at her.

" Kay, what am I going to do?" wailed Claire. " Fitzy has suddenly appeared out of the blue. He didn't know it was prom week, but now he wants to go, and he says he wants to take the girl who kissed him at the door. Heaven knows who it was! Kay, was it you?"

" Yes," said Kay, " it was — plainly speaking — me. I recognized his picture, and I welcomed the old friend."

" He seemed to like it," went on Claire. " Anyhow, he insists on coming up to-night, because he never went to a girls' prom, and I promised him you'd go. He won't mind your gym suit, or whatever it is you want to wear."

" I'd thought of wearing one of the Scourge's costumes," said Kay airily. " You might tell him to stick around, and I may drift in later on in the evening."

" Fine!" approved Claire. " Tacky and I have to rush off, because our men are here, and I have to pop into the receiving line. And you'll be there for the toasts, Kay?"

" Y-y-y-yes," quavered Kay, who felt an idea about to be born, but was not quite certain what it was.

It was an hour later that the birth actually took place, after an hour of raging at the Scourge's tyranny and the insult of the green dress. There was no getting around the fact that the Scourge had actually meant to be insulting. Kay had worked up a fine red-haired rage over the business, until she was prepared to scratch out the lady's eyes; but a better revenge occurred to her when she idly recalled the words of the sophomore who had seen her with the green dress.

III

Every one was over at Recreation Hall, including even the underclassmen who hung over fire escapes and window sills enviously devouring the rare spectacle of men in bulk.

Kay saw only one freshman—the fat little one who was perpetually being sent home with nervous breakdowns — when she opened her door to look for an assistant in her conspiracy. That one she beckoned commandingly.

" I want you to go over to Faculty Hall and sneak me the Scourge's lemon-colored shoes," she ordered.

Kay had decided to wear the green dress —yes, but she was going to make the Scourge sorry that she did.

While the freshman was rushing over to Faculty Hall, trembling at the honor of being commissioned by an upperclassman—the popular Miss Fielding, of all people—Kay was arranging her hair in the little pointed peak that Miss Thomas affected, and doing her best with the multitude of hooks and eyes on the green dress.

She giggled at her reflection in the mirror, but she was still angry enough to go on with the thing. She thought of Claire's Fitzy, who would probably be waiting around downstairs for her appearance. She wondered what he would say when he saw what he had to escort.

It was really too bad about him. For three years Kay had taken a sisterly interest in him, and she had always planned that when she actually did meet him he was going to be staggered. That would be, of course, after she was out of college and earning an enormous salary, all of which she would spend on dress and beauty parlors. Her freckles would all be gone, and she would have a brilliant manicure—something which Kay attempted regularly every New Year's Day and then let slide for another year.

Instead of Fitzy seeing her first in a *svelte* Parisian costume, all beautified and refined, he was going to see her in a ghastly green thing of latter nineteenth century vintage. It was too bad, but Kay reflected that one usually does have to make sacrifices for one's revenge. Fitzy would have to be forgotten.

After the freshman, giggling nervously, had helped her on with the long, slender, ornate lemon-colored shoes, Kay gave a look of pride at her image in the mirror. She had experimented with Claire's mauve and purple and henna face powders with excellent effect, so that she actually suggested the Scourge's bilious coloring. The little slant she had given to her coiffure gave her the menacing, ridiculously dignified expression which had helped to get the Scourge her nickname. Kay's own grimy, black-rimmed finger nails made an insulting touch to the picture, which she fully appreciated.

" Oh, Miss Fielding!" gasped the freshman, awestruck at the other's daring. " I do hope you won't get expelled for this!"

Kay, her hand on the knob of the door, paused.

" Deary," she said vulgarly, " it would be worth the price!"

IV

HUGH FITZMORSE, serene in the distinction of being the only man present in business clothes, had attached himself, after Claire's early desertion, to a frail, smiling woman whom he understood to be Dean Greenleaf. This association, he was confident, would lend dignity to his soft collar and garnet necktie.

So far as the girls were concerned, Fitzy would have been welcome in any guise, for he happened to answer the requirements of the year for the ideal man. He had a strong, taut-skinned, brown face, which still retained a few large brown freckles. He had a jolly big mouth with big, gleaming white teeth. He looked, on the whole, as if he canoed, and had beefsteak dinners on the beach, and wore a dirty khaki shirt all summer—which he did.

If he had appeared five years before, he would have been outclassed by the pompadoured, tangoing gentlemen who used to bloom at a *thé dansant* of that period; but fashions in men change. Fitzy and the jolly ugly men had come into their own.

" Neighbors for years," Claire was confiding to those who expressed their interest in the distinguished-looking young man in " cits " with the dean. " Our families would like — but you know how families are! He's waiting for Kay. If she doesn't come in ten minutes, I'm going to send for her. We are going into the dining room in seven minutes, and she's simply got to be there to propose the healths and—well, you know!"

Claire was a little disturbed by the way her supply of men were behaving. It was all very well inviting them for one's friends, with a slight material reward, but it was generally accepted that the men were, after all, Claire's men, and not to be vamped by the lessees. In spite of this understanding, scarcely was the third dance over when

Tacky, ravishing in pink tulle, disappeared from the ballroom with Bobby Watts, a last year's *fiancé* of Claire's, from Cornell.

Now to the innocent eye of the chaperons, Tacky and Claire had merely gone out for punch; but Claire's watchful eye noted that they cut the next four dances, which could only mean that they were holding hands in the chapel. Furthermore, three other couples of her arrangement had followed the example set by Tacky. Claire was frankly piqued. She was not making gifts of her men, she reflected sourly, but merely loaning them for the evening.

One couple that Claire's escort graft had brought together—Fred Tuller and Martha Gay — had frankly and completely fallen for each other. This was a source of tremendous amusement to the other girls, since Martha, a dowdy, law-abiding little dub, had been crowned Queen of the Crumbs. Claire, with her genius for the appropriate, had obtained for Miss Gay the very worst crumb of her male acquaintance, the equally dowdy and dubby Fred Tuller —on the debating team of his college, too, so Claire had boasted to the eager Martha.

This affair did not trouble Claire, but the one between Tacky and Bobby did, for Bobby was very useful to her occasionally. However, she could only fret inwardly, and meantime keep an anxious blue eye on the door, so that she might seize Kay the instant she entered and sweep her, with Fitzy, into the dining room.

If Kay did not appear, Claire was prepared to cast her roommate out of her life forever, since the one thing in which Claire did not excel, politically, was public speaking. On the few occasions when the junior president had been called upon for formal utterance in the past year, Claire had put herself completely in Kay's hands. She had memorized Kay's speeches, and had had Kay at her side to support her in the frightful ordeal. In spite of Kay, she had sometimes got away with only the first sentence or two, and then had sat down blandly with a charming, apologetic little smile.

To-night there were too many attractive men present for Claire to relish the thought of appearing stupid before them. She would have longed to preside wittily, scattering brilliant epigrams to right and left, and astounding every one with her cleverness; but this was a trick Claire was not to perfect for several years. To-night she needed Kay, and she needed her at once, for the caterer in charge had just given the announcement for the orchestra to stop and supper to begin.

She hurried up to Dean Greenleaf desperately, her own man tagging after her, depressed with the conviction that women should pay more attention to their escorts and less to their political duties.

"Miss Greenleaf, Kay has not come in yet, and supper simply cannot begin until she gets here," she whispered.

Fitzy, who had not detached himself from the dean for one instant since his arrival, stood politely aloof, as if his close associations with the faculty would not permit him to revive his former familiarity with a mere student.

Dean Greenleaf, demurely Victorian in white georgette, looked anxiously toward the Scourge.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed, troubled at the unpleasant things that lay in store for Katherine Fielding if she dared to defy Miss Ellen Thomas. "I'm afraid Miss Thomas will be very angry. She—she is so much interested in Katherine!"

"Not any more than I am," grimly answered Claire. "She's got to give those toasts, if I have to send Fitzy up to drag her in. I'm not feeling well enough to do that sort of thing myself this evening."

"Glad to be of any service," alertly put in Fitzy.

The dean stole an amused glance at him. She rather suspected him of being in love with pretty Claire Paige, and fancied they had been staging a lovers' quarrel during the evening. She knew that amorous entanglements among the students were to be avoided, but she got so much secret pleasure from watching young love affairs that she tried to persuade herself that she didn't suspect a thing.

"I'm almost tempted to get the Scourge after her," Claire said irritatedly. "She could do it."

"Supposing we go into the dining room, and, if Katherine does not come in after we are all seated, perhaps I could announce an alteration in the program," suggested the dean kindly, for she understood Claire perfectly.

Claire brightened. She clutched the dean's small, cool hand.

"That's darling of you when I feel so—so faint!"

She turned to her own Brooks Tucker with immense relief, and was able, for the first time that evening, to look up into his face with the wistful, adoring look which she had always found so effective with California men, Brooks being from Los Angeles.

"Tell me," she said, "about California."

Tacky and Bobby had appeared from nowhere, and followed them into the dining room, Tacky looking coy and smiling at Claire. Fred Tuller and Martha Gay cast grateful looks at Claire as they passed her table. They went on to seat themselves at a table which Claire had specially planned for the dubs, and for the group sneeringly designated by Kay as the Jolly Wholesomes.

The Scourge, by virtue of her years, had to be placed at the head table, and there she sat, casting a blight wherever she glanced, and looking with covert sourness at the dean's place of honor next to the junior president. The dean herself was none too comfortable under the Scourge's eye. Indeed, she never expected to be as long as she stayed at Lacus College. She had never understood the Scourge's importance, yet the students seemed to hold her in far more respect than they accorded to their president, now abroad.

If this was due to affection, the dean saw that she must not antagonize the girls by gently showing the Scourge what was what, and so she had been deferential and obedient; but it had been an unhappy six months for the poor lady, as she puzzled over a mere professor's apparent right to settle the dean's official problems. Miss Greenleaf had privately determined to tender her resignation unless things adjusted themselves more agreeably.

She sat at the table now, smiling at the amusingly dignified young man beside her, while her thoughts revolved in troubled fashion about Kay Fielding and the Scourge. She wished she had known before of Kay's situation. It would have been such a pleasure to outfit her properly, if the thing could have been quietly arranged. Surely the child must suffer from Miss Thomas's obvious tyranny.

The dean bit her lip at her own helplessness in an affair that was plainly in her official province. Fitzy caught her in a scowl, which she sent over to the Scourge.

V

So it happened that while Kay fluttered down the staircase, with a fat, tittering freshman staring after her, there were three people in Recreation Hall praying for her arrival. First there was the dean, who wanted to save her from the Scourge's punishment; then Claire, who wanted to save herself from a humiliating dilemma; and lastly Fitzy, whose curiosity had been piqued by Claire's tales of Kay's exploits, and who was keen enough to sense drama in the air.

As for Kay, she was resolved to have her revenge or die. Just for a moment, as she looked through the window from outside Recreation Hall, she had a qualm. She could see the Scourge sitting upright, looking about the tables. Kay knew for whom she was looking.

"All right, old girl!" she whispered grimly. "I'm on my way!"

She adjusted her voluminous sleeves, with her eyes fixed a little wistfully on the crowds of girls in their pastel chiffons, the splotches of masculine black among them only accentuating their lacy delicacy. Kay would have liked the dress Fanny Beggs wore, she thought fleetingly, as Fanny, in orchid tulle and sweet peas, passed before the window to her table. She had never had a chance to look pretty—never in her whole life!

There was Lora Duffield, too, looking rather gloomy with the vivacious Town Boy. Lora had confided to Kay, at the last minute, that she had been ordered by the matron to help the negro caterer serve and to send her man into the dining room alone. As a matter of fact, the caterer had been indignant that one of the "missies" had been asked to help him, and had sent her flying back into the ballroom. He had a realization of the proprieties, if the matron hadn't.

But Lora did look pretty in her green taffeta. For an instant Kay sniffled in self-pity, and then rage came over her to think that the Scourge wanted her to wear that ridiculous costume there with all those lovely gowns.

"I may not look pretty," she reflected defiantly, "but I do look funny, and no mistake!"

VI

Three hours afterward, juniors in exquisite evening gowns rolled on the floor in Kay's room, hysterically going over her dramatic entrance at the banquet table. Serious-minded members of the faculty giggled in the faculty drawing-room, next day, discussing Kay's astounding impersonation. In the dean's dainty boudoir, that very night, a fragile little brown-haired lady in the early forties sat at a black walnut escritoire, smiling over a letter that she was writing to a jolly-eyed, gray-haired gentleman in charge of a special phase of Yale undergraduate thought.

Kay, after her first overwhelming realization of what she was doing, flung back her head in the Scourge's best manner, and bristled up to the head table, while a stunned silence fell over the hall. Then a titter began, followed by a swelling roar of laughter.

Before sitting down, Kay stopped short, drew herself up to her full height, turned around, and glared ominously at the assembly. She bowed frostily to Claire, nodded patronizingly to the dean, and took in Fitzy and his tweed with freezing scorn.

Chairs were drawn back at all the tables, and excited girls whispered of Kay's reputed waggishness to amused escorts. Faculty guests endeavored to appear disapproving, and succeeded in looking interested and human. Waiters hurried up to the caterer, demanding to know if there was to be a cabaret or entertainment before the dinner. As for Dean Greenleaf, she sat demurely silent, though within her was a triumphant joy in the courage that dared defy Miss Thomas.

Kay began to speak, proposed her toasts, and glared down the gigglers, so perfectly in the manner of the Scourge that a few were actually intimidated by her "squelches"—a word which the Scourge had inspired some time before. She made deprecatory allusions to dancing and merrymaking, as the Scourge always did on festive occasions, and sat down after a brief and unflattering comparison of the young folks of to-day and the young folks of thirty years ago.

The dining room was in an uproar as soon as she had sat down, and Kay, after an exchange of glances with a choking Claire, decided that the better part of valor was discretion. She kissed her hand impudently to the dining room and fled to the nearest exit, her green draperies flung irreverently over her arm.

Once outside the hall, she scrambled across the college toward the dormitory as fast as she could go. She didn't care what they did with her now. She felt only a fierce elation in her triumph.

The girls and the men were shrieking over the impersonation, stopping short every time they met the Scourge's furious eye. Kay's own chums were certain that it would mean expulsion, and exchanged frantic comments from table to table. They were already on the point of getting up a petition to save her from her certain doom.

The Scourge, purple with indignation, leaned toward the dean.

"I think, Miss Greenleaf, that this is a matter which cannot wait until morning," she said in a low voice. "I recommend that you call a faculty meeting at once in the Tennis Club room, to have that girl instantly expelled. She ought not to be allowed on the grounds overnight!"

The dean lifted her eyebrows. At last the time had come to show this tyrant that she, and not Ellen Thomas, was dean. Kay's defiance had given her the courage to fight for her own prestige, and for the first time she saw that the girls' apparent allegiance to the Scourge was not inspired by affection, but by terror. It was not she, Alicia Greenleaf, but Ellen Thomas, who was the interloper in the college.

"I think, Miss Thomas," said the dean clearly, "that I am the best judge as to occasions for faculty conferences. Certainly Miss Fielding will remain in the college. As representative of President Crawford I will say that much. Her impersonation was a spontaneous bit of fun that I feel ought to be encouraged among young people."

"It was an insult—an insult to me!"

The Scourge's voice trembled with rage.

"I think you misunderstood," said the dean quietly. "Any seasoned teacher is accustomed to student cartoons and burlesques, and takes them for what they are—merely good-natured raillery. It is absurd to assume that I shall punish any one for it. I value spontaneity among my girls too highly."

It was, Claire said afterward, as fine a bit of "squelching" as had ever been exhibited at Lacus College. The Scourge simply collapsed in amazement, while the dean, smiling brightly, continued her conversation with the senior president and her escort.

In the dean's mind ideas were flowering as to what she would do with the power she had hitherto been afraid to use. There were a number of things she wanted to arrange for the working students—things of which she knew the Scourge would disapprove. Now, at last, she felt free to do as she thought best for the girls; and the first thing to be done was to find an agreeable berth for Kay Fielding.

"I need a secretary," mused the dean. "Perhaps she would let me provide her wardrobe, too, if I made it on a five-year loan basis. Poor child, she looked so gallant coming here in that atrocity among all the pretty dresses! I will send for her the first thing to-morrow, before the luncheon party."

Claire, reading the signs correctly, gave the signal to Tacky that Kay was in safe hands, and Tacky proceeded to tell Bobby of the daring episodes that had marked Kay Fielding's career at Lacus. Claire leaned gently and winsomely toward Brooks for her customary between-soup-and-fish repartee.

"You know, Brooks," she sighed, "women don't like me."

Oddly enough, her impudent little roommate was at that moment speculating as to whether Claire had got to that particular line. She knew Claire so well that she could have told the exact course of her conversation with a young man in a given number of hours. Indeed, she had often threatened to steal her stuff.

Kay had gone from the dining room to the dormitory; but the place was so deserted that she paused on the dark veranda, and decided to sit in the canvas swing for a while, until she could manage to get her thoughts together.

Somehow she could not realize that she had actually done that frightfully audacious thing over there in the dining room. Surely it was a dream! Kay felt the knob on the top of her head, and slowly took out the hairpins. Well, she was done for now! To-morrow the dean would send for her, and she would be expelled.

She didn't know where she would go. The family would not understand at all. They never did. She'd have to go to Chicago, or New York, or some place, and get a job. But then she didn't have the money.

"Still," and Kay sighed reminiscently, "it was worth it!"

She saw a dark figure coming swiftly up the path, and she sat very still. One of the men had been sent over for a scarf or wrap, probably. If she sat very still, he would not see her in the dark.

Then she heard her name in a stage whisper. It was Fitzy.

"Where are you?"

He stumbled across the wicker chairs in the darkness toward her.

"Did Claire Paige send you?" asked Kay, bewildered.

"She didn't have to," cheerfully answered Fitzy, settling himself calmly beside her. "After that nice warm welcome to-day—"

"No fair!" warmed Kay, slightly uncomfortable. "You see, I—I—"

"Never mind!" Fitzy assured her magnificently. "Girls always act that way about me. I only wanted to apologize for seeming a little bit cold and—er—restrained at first. It's not my nature at all. As a rule I—"

"I don't doubt it," cut in Kay, furiously red, and conscious that her hair was decidedly informal in arrangement. "But please tell me why you followed me to-night. Do they want me to leave?"

"It was suggested by that old terror in purple," admitted Fitzy; "but my friend the dean came to the rescue, and everything is all right now. The dean is strong for you, and ready to present a diadem."

"I am—oh, I am glad!"

Kay breathed freely once again.

Fitzy bent over toward her, and studied her face curiously in the light of a stray moonbeam.

"Claire's been telling me about you for years, but do you know she never said a word about this gorgeous red hair—"

Kay swiftly jabbed in a couple of hairpins. He was trying to tease her! Certainly she must look frightful; and how horrid it was to look comic to the person you wanted to consider you fascinating! From now on, Kay vowed mentally, she was going to study Claire's technic.

"Don't put it up," begged Fitzy, and his voice had a warm tone that made Kay know he was not teasing her, after all. "I was just telling the dean that it takes a truly attractive girl to dare to appear funny when men are around. I'll bet you don't take a lip stick and mascara on a camping trip, do you?"

"I'm lucky if I take a comb," rippled Kay.

"I knew we were affinities!" He nodded triumphantly, and leaned back in the swing. "Just the kind of girl I've been hunting. Attractive—"

“But I'm not attractive,” confessed Kay woefully. “I didn't want you ever to see me until I was rich and tall and *svelte* and beautiful—”

Fitzy threw back his head and laughed merrily.

“We'll take care of that,” he assured her. Kay felt suddenly snug and protected, as if she no longer needed to fight her own battles. “You know, Kay, I think we need to see a lot of each other. I want to know all about you, and all that sort of thing.”

Kay murmured a faint response. She was happy. It could not be true that she was sitting here with Fitzy, and that Fitzy liked her. He slipped his hand over hers, and Kay did not take hers away.

“You know,” she sighed wistfully, after a moment, “women don't like me.”

Nickie and Pem

THE STORY OF A YOUNG WOMAN WHO DID NOT WANT TO WASTE HER LIFE

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

“PEM, you're too darned good!” said Nickie.

“I don't call it being good,” replied Miss Pembroke. “I call it simply being self-respecting.”

This was the sort of thing her friends found objectionable, and Nickie began to object now.

“Lord!” said she. “Don't we work hard enough to deserve a little fun now and then? It won't hurt your precious self-respect to speak to a man now and then, will it? I can't—”

“Oh, that's all nonsense!” interrupted Miss Pembroke. “I see enough of men, and I put up with enough from them. When I'm off duty, I don't have to put up with anything, and I *won't!*”

“Nobody wants you to. The boys who are coming this evening are awfully nice boys. If you'd just come in and speak to them—”

Miss Pembroke closed her book sharply.

“Nickie,” she said, “I'm very fond of you; but I don't like your friends—not any of them—and I wish you'd let me alone.”

“Certainly,” replied Nickie, in a haughty and offended tone.

She turned all her attention upon the process of manicuring, but neither the haughtiness nor the silence reassured Miss Pembroke, who knew that they wouldn't last. It was hardly worth while to open her book again, for Nickie would be sure to interrupt.

“It's getting to be too much of a good thing,” she reflected. “I needed a good rest after that last case, but I'll never get it while Nickie's here. This whole thing was a mistake. I ought to have taken a room somewhere by myself, where I couldn't be bothered.”

This was by no means the first time she had regretted her present domestic arrangements. It was all Nickie's fault, of course. Nickie had told her what a fine thing it would be to join with three other graduate nurses in taking a flat.

“A nice little home of our own,” Nickie had said, “where we can rest when we want to, and entertain our friends, and keep all our things. The other girls are simply great. You'll like them.”

Miss Pembroke had said that five girls were too many.

“But we'll never all be home at the same time,” Nickie had assured her. “Lots of times you and I will have the place to ourselves.”

In the course of a year this had happened only once. When Nickie was at home, Pem was off on a case. When Pem came home, instead of finding her faithful

Nickie, one of the other girls would be there, or sometimes two of them; and Pem didn't like them. She didn't like their "parties," or their conversation, or their cheerful, careless style of housekeeping.

She herself was never careless, and, though she was even-tempered and polite, she wasn't often cheerful. As a nurse, she was matchless. Doctors wanted to send her to their most troublesome and exacting patients, because not only was she quick, capable, and intelligent, but she could hold her tongue and keep her temper, and she had a cool, quiet way with her that kept her patients in good order.

But this cool, quiet way of which doctors so highly approved was not at all pleasing to her housemates. Even Nickie thought it deplorable.

"Pem," she had said to her once, "you could be young and beautiful, if you'd only learn how!"

There was truth in that observation. Miss Pembroke had both youth and beauty, and somehow managed to disguise them, so that they often went unnoticed. People would say that she was "impressive," or "dignified," or something of that sort, because they never saw her off guard, as Nickie saw her now. She was a tall, slender, dark-haired girl, with an austere, fine-bred face—not the sort of face one would turn to look after in the street, but a face which patients—above all, male patients—found very, very hard to forget. Her slender hands were clasped about one knee, and her clear amber eyes were staring thoughtfully before her. She was, thought Nickie, engaged in daydreams of some mysterious and enchanting kind unknown to more ordinary girls. But in reality—

"Nickie's getting coarse," Miss Pembroke was reflecting.

There was no coarseness to be seen in Miss Nicholson's rosy, jolly face, nor to be observed in her manners and conversation. Indeed, no one but Miss Pembroke had yet seen any trace of it; but Pem was by nature critical, and just at this moment she was jaded and dispirited after six weeks of a ferocious typhoid patient, who had fallen in love with her in a very trying and ill-tempered way. Moreover, she was mortally weary of Nickie's persistence.

"I'm sick and tired of men," she thought. "All Nickie ever thinks of is men, and going to parties, and having what she calls a good time."

Now this was not quite doing justice to Nickie. When she was not working, she was undeniably very fond of playing; but when you consider how very short and infrequent were her play times, and how very hard and exhausting was her work; when you consider that this lively, warm-hearted young creature had to witness every sort of human agony and wretchedness; when you bear in mind the tremendous responsibilities she so faithfully accepted; her generous readiness to do more than she needed to do, her charity, her sympathy, her sturdy courage—when you think of all this, it is not difficult to forgive her for being somewhat frivolous during her little hours of freedom.

There were weeks at a time when men, parties, and having a good time gave her mighty little concern. Just now, however, her mind was entirely given to such matters; and, as Pem expected, she couldn't help trying again to persuade her friend.

"Oh, Pem!" she said coaxingly. "Just this once! Come in and speak to the boys, and if you don't like them—"

"No!" said Pem.

But she did, and, by doing so, she changed the course of three lives.

She had no intention of seeing Nickie's friends. In fact, she came nearer to quarreling with Nickie than she had ever yet come, and she retired to her own room with flushed cheeks and a frown on her calm brow. She was not in the habit of losing her temper, and this unusual annoyance disturbed her. She was restless, and couldn't settle down to read or sew.

Her neat little room seemed all at once too neat and too little, and she wanted to get out of it. It was a clear, fine night. A walk, even a solitary and aimless one, wouldn't be bad. She had put on her hat and coat, and was just about to open her door, when—when Nickie's party arrived.

Impossible to go out now! In order to reach the front door, she would have to pass by the sitting room, and Nickie would see her and stop her.

"Nickie has absolutely no pride!" she thought, angrier than ever. "Even after what I said to her, she'd try to drag me in there!"

She took off her hat and flung it on the bed.

"I'll read," she decided.

She couldn't read. The party disturbed her too much. They were laughing and talking, and presently some one began to play the piano and sing. It was an idiotic song, but it was delivered in a hearty, boyish voice that was somehow very touching.

There was violent applause when the singer finished, and after a few minutes he began again.

Pem came nearer to the door, her face grown very pale. "Keep the Home Fires Burning!" Some one else sang that—one night in Montreal—the night before the troop ship went out—a boy in a lieutenant's uniform. Pem snapped the light and stood listening in the dark, her hands clenched, her eyes closed.

> "So turn the dark clouds inside out,
> Till the boys come home."

"Oh, God!" whispered Pem; for that boy would never come home, and the Pem who had listened to his gallant young voice was gone, too.

The singing stopped, only not for Pem. It went on sounding in her ears. The voice that she would never hear again and the living voice mingled together until she could bear it no longer. She must go in and see this other one—see with her own eyes that he was a stranger, in no way like —any one else.

II

Nickie welcomed her with a cry of joy.

"Here's my pal!" she said, triumphantly. "Now you'll all have to be good little boys. Pem, here's Mr. Brown and Mr. Caswell and Mr. Hadley. Look 'em over!"

But the only one Pem wanted to see was Caswell—the boy who had been singing, the boy who must not look like some one else. Well, he didn't. That one had been fair and this one was dark. There was no resemblance in a single feature; and yet the spell was not broken.

There was some quality in this man that stirred intolerable memories to life in Pem —something in his voice, in his smile, in the hearty grip of his hand. She looked and looked at him, trying in vain to catch that fugitive likeness.

She had never been so lovely, or so utterly careless of her own beauty. Her eyes were wonderfully luminous and soft in her pale face. Her hair, a little disordered by the hat she had pulled off, floated about her forehead in tiny, misty threads. She hadn't a trace of that cool, quiet manner now.

Under that look of hers young Caswell grew suddenly ardent.

"I say!" he began. "You know—you're simply—simply marvelous!"

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Nickie, delighted. "Now sing some more, Cas. That's what brought her to."

"No," said Pem. "Please don't."

The spell was slowly dissolving. She could see Caswell without illusions now—an ordinary nice-looking young fellow, unfortunately a little the worse for drink just now, like the others.

She had come in without any idea of staying, but for Nickie's sake she resigned herself to a wearisome half hour. This was Nickie's idea of a good time, and these were Nickie's "awfully nice boys"! One of them offered Pem his pocket flask, but she declined, civilly enough, and sat down on the piano stool, so that Caswell couldn't sing again.

She was quite aware that he was looking at her all the time. Very well, let him look! She felt a thousand miles away from him and the others, and somehow very lonely.

This sudden change disturbed Nickie. Now that she had got Pem here at last, it would never do to let the party prove a fizzle. She whispered to one of the men, and then called out:

"Pem, get your hat on! We're all going up to the Devon to dance!"

"No, thanks," said Pem firmly.

There was a chorus of protests.

"Oh, come on, Pem!" Nickie entreated. "I don't want to go alone with three fellows, and I'm dying for a dance. Please, Pem, just for an hour!"

"No, thanks," said Pem again. "I'm sorry, but I don't feel up to it. I'm tired."

And then, beside her, she heard a voice which, in spite of herself, she could not hear unmoved.

"I say, Miss Pembroke! Please!"

She shook her head, but she smiled, for once more she caught a glimpse of that curious likeness, and it made her gentle toward him. What was it? What could she see in this flushed, unsteady boy to put her in mind of that other, fine and stern, a young knight?

"Look here!" said Caswell, bending lower, so that only she could hear. "Please don't—don't judge me by this. I—I'm—I can't tell you how sorry I am for you to see me—like this. I—I don't do it, you know, I give you my word. You see, I've just come back from Melbourne, and this was my first night on shore, and—if you'd just give me another chance!"

"All right, I will," said Pem suddenly. "I'll see you again. I'll be glad to."

And she meant it. She no longer wanted to deny the unreasonable, half scornful liking she felt for this man. She did like him, and that was enough.

"Oh, but, look here!" he cried. "We're sailing to-morrow for Halifax. I've only got this one night!"

"But you'll come back to New York, won't you?"

"Oh, some day!" he answered bitterly. "God knows when—*I* don't. We're running all over after cargoes. We may come back here from Halifax, and we may go anywhere. It may be months before I see you again."

"Would that be so awful?" asked Pem, with a smile.

But he didn't smile.

"Yes," he said. "It would—for me!"

Pem was annoyed at her own response to his emotion. She wanted to laugh at him, and she could not. This was the worst sort of nonsense—the sort of thing Nickie was always telling her about. Nickie would call this "thrilling." Well, Pem didn't.

"I'm sorry for you," she said ironically; but, as if there were magic in his eyes, the words turned to truth when she looked at him. "Please don't be silly!" she added, in a quite different voice—gentle, almost appealing.

"The only silly thing would be to pretend it wasn't like this," said he. "I didn't want it to be this way, but—it just happened. As soon as I saw you—"

Pem jumped up.

"All right, Nickie!" she called out. "I'll go with you!"

III

Caswell got into the taxi after her and slammed the door.

"Oh, Pem!" he said. "Pem, you wonderful girl!"

"You know you really are silly!" she protested.

"Then I hope to Heaven I'll never be anything else! I'd give all the common sense and prudence and so on in the world for one night like this. Hang being sensible, anyhow! Let's be silly, Pem!"

"I am—I have been—sillier than I ever was before in my life. Don't, Arthur!"

She felt obliged to object to his putting his arm about her shoulders and kissing her—a very unconvincing little objection, however, to which he paid no attention.

"You do love me, don't you, Pem?" he asked, and waited a long time. "Pem! I say, Pem! You do love me, don't you?"

"Oh, I really don't know!" she cried impatiently.

Was it love, she thought? It was not in any way the love she had felt before—not that strange and terrible thing, half pride, half humility, half anguish and half ecstasy.

"That couldn't ever come again," she thought.

It had been her consolation for so long, that never again would that intolerable emotion stir her heart. After she had lost that one man, there wasn't another walking the earth who could capture her interest—until this evening.

She couldn't understand the glamour that enveloped young Caswell, the inexplicable charm of him. He was neither very handsome nor very clever — just an ordinary nice-looking boy; and yet, when he said that he would give all the common sense and prudence and so on in the world for one night like this, she agreed with him in her heart.

They had gone to a restaurant and danced, they had taken a taxicab to another restaurant and danced again, they had had supper—that was all there was to it. It was simply one of those brainless "parties" so dear to Nickie — with too much drinking on the part of the men, too much smoking, the stupidest sort of talk and laughter. Then why had it been so beautiful? Because of that boy's glance which always followed her, that look on his face, his fervent, halting love-making?

Suddenly she stopped trying to reason about it. It *was* beautiful. She had been utterly happy again; she was happy now.

"Pem!" he said. "Oh, Pem! Can't you tell me? I'm going away, you know."

His voice broke, she felt the arm about her shoulders tremble a little, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I'm afraid I do love you," she said.

She gave him one kiss, and then, with a little laugh, pushed him away.

"Don't talk any more about it — not now," she said. "Look! The sky's getting light. It's morning."

"And I'm due on board at ten o'clock," he said. "I'll come back to you, Pem.

Pem, you won't forget me? You won't—you couldn't, could you, Pem?"

"I don't think so," she answered.

The taxi had stopped before the apartment house, where Nickie and the two other boys, just arrived, were waiting for them in the street. A pallid light was spreading in the sky, and a strange quiet lay over the city. Trucks rumbled far away, but there wasn't a voice or a footstep. The street lamps still burned wanly.

"It's time for breakfast," suggested one of the boys. "Let's go to a beanery and have something to eat."

"No!" said Pem sharply. "We've had enough. Good-by! Come on, Nickie!"

For she had seen on Nickie's face something that hurt her—something that she had often seen in the mirror, reflected in her own eyes.

IV

Nickie was lying on the bed, flat on her back, without a pillow, her eyes resolutely closed, in a stern effort to rest. That morning, just as she was saying good-by—very willingly — to the cantankerous old lady with a broken arm whom she had been attending for three weeks, Dr. Lucas had telephoned and told her that he wanted her for night duty on a pneumonia case. It was a bad case, and she had a bad night ahead of her. She must rest now; but she couldn't. This wasn't rest.

She heard the key turned in the latch, and the front door opened quietly.

"Hello, Mac!" she called.

But it was not Miss McCarty who answered. It was Pem.

"You home, Nickie?" she said. "That's nice."

She came into the bedroom. Nickie sat up and stared at her with wide eyes.

"For Pete's sake!" she exclaimed. "What's the meaning of all this, Pem?"

"I don't know," replied Pem slowly. She had taken off her hat and coat, and was looking at herself in the glass—at her carefully dressed hair, the artful touch of color in her cheeks, the new frock of navy twill with red leather buttons. "I look rather nice, don't I, Nickie?"

"Yes," said Nickie, "stunning; but—well, I suppose I'm not used to it. But what's the reason, Pem?"

Pem's explanation did not satisfy her. Pem said that her patient was a wealthy young woman suffering from a mild form of melancholia. She had to be diverted, and—

"I had to look halfway decent, going about with her," said Pem. "She wanted me to."

"Finished now?" Nickie asked.

"No—it may last for months; but I often get an afternoon off when her sister comes to stay with her. She likes me to clear out sometimes, so that she can tell her sister how awful I am."

"Doesn't she like you, Pem?"

"Oh, pretty well; but she doesn't really like anybody but herself. That's what's the matter with her. She's got everything on earth—money, and friends, and a wonderful husband. Lend me some of your powder, Nickie?"

"Powder? Going out again now, Pem?"

Pem nodded.

"Who with?"

"With a man," said Pem, laughing. "Don't faint!"

"Of course it's not my business," observed Nickie, "but it—it isn't the husband, is it?"

She waited a long time for an answer.

"I wish you'd tell me, Pem. I always tell you things."

Pem turned and looked at her steadily.

"No, you don't, Nickie," she said; "not always."

Nickie looked back at her friend quite as steadily.

"I do," she said. "I tell you anything that really matters. You see, Pem, the reason I am asking this is because I thought you were rather gone on Arthur Caswell. You see, I've known him for a long while, so I—"

Pem turned to open the bureau drawer, and to take out a pair of white gloves and a handkerchief.

"I'll tell you something, Nickie," she said in a curt, cool voice. "He would never have looked at me that night if I had been my real self. I acted like a fool, and that's what he liked. That's what every one likes. After he'd gone, everything seemed tame and flat, and I felt so lonely that I couldn't stand it. I'm going to keep on being a fool, Nickie. I'm going to make people like me. I'm going to live, and enjoy myself!"

"All right," said Nickie; "but what about Arthur Caswell?"

"He'll never come back."

"Yes, he will."

"If he does, then—but he won't. I'm not going to waste my life—or what's left of it."

"If I was going to waste any lives," said Nickie, "I'd rather waste my own than any one else's."

Pem was astounded.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "Are you trying to preach to me, Nickie? It was you who started the whole thing—always pestering me to go to parties."

"I never went out with a married man in my life," said Nickie; "and I never would, either."

"That's a little too much, after that last party!" returned Pem scornfully. "You wouldn't go out with a married man, but you don't mind three fellows who've been drinking!"

"How do you know I didn't mind?" cried Nickie, jumping up. "Just let me tell you, Pem—I knew Arthur Caswell's people in Halifax. His father's a strict Presbyterian. I know what he'd think about that, and I'd have stopped Arthur, too, if—"

Pem was about to make a sharp retort, but she changed her mind in time. Going over to Nickie, she put her arms about her friend.

"I'm sorry, little pal," she said gently. "I didn't mean to."

Nickie gave her a rough little hug.

"All right, Pem," she said. "I know! But, Pem, for my sake, please don't go out with this man. You'll be sorry for it—awfully sorry. It's not like you. Don't do it, Pem!"

"You don't understand, Nickie. He's a wonderful man, so honorable—"

"He's not honorable if he goes out with you behind his wife's back."

"How can he help it, when she's turned her back on him for good? She's horrible to him. Nobody else would have put up with her as he has. He is honorable, Nickie; he's a gentleman through and through. He's so lonely—you don't know what that is, but I do. He's longing and longing for women to be nice and friendly to him. If his wife was ever halfway decent to him—"

She stopped short, because the doorbell had rung.

"There he is," she said. "Nickie, it's nothing to be ashamed of. I wish you'd see him and talk to him. Then you'd understand. Open the door and talk to him while I'm getting ready."

Nickie hesitated for a moment.

"All right!" she said, then. "I'll talk to him!"

Without even troubling to smooth her unruly hair, off she went, down the passage. In a moment she was back.

"Pem," she cried, "Arthur Caswell is here!"

They stared at each other in a sort of dismay, both speechless for a time.

"I'll take him out, quick," said Pem. "When Mr. Blanchard comes, tell him something—anything. I'll see you later, Nickie. I'll stop here before I go back to Mr. Blanchard's."

"All right," Nickie said again.

When Pem had gone, she closed the bedroom door after her; but she didn't even try to rest now.

V

Pem went down the passage with a lagging step and a heart strangely troubled and doubting.

"No," she said to herself. "Of course it can't be like that. I just imagined it. I've thought about it so much that—no, it couldn't really have been so wonderful. He couldn't have been so dear. When I see him again I shall get over being so silly."

But that silliness was the best thing in her life. For weeks the glamour of that enchanted evening had colored all her days. The music they had danced to still sounded in her ears, faint and stirring. When she closed her eyes, she could see again the sparkle and glitter of that tinsel fairyland of Broadway, made true and fine by the boy's love.

"I won't be an idiot!" she told herself. "When I see him again, I'll find that he's—not really like that!"

So, with what fortitude she had, she entered the little sitting room. He didn't hear her. He was standing at the window, with his back toward the room, his hands in his pockets—such a straight, stalwart figure!

"Hello!" said Pem. "It's a surprise to see you here again!"

Then he turned, and it was true, all of it—that look she had remembered, that glamour, that enchantment.

"Oh, Pem!" he said. "Didn't you know I'd come?"

For a minute she was utterly content in his arms, as if her restless and disconsolate spirit had at last found peace; but not for long. She moved away, still holding his hand, and looking at him with a misty smile.

"You're so beautiful!" he said. "Sometimes I thought you couldn't be as lovely as I remembered, but you're a hundred times—"

The clock on the mantelpiece struck three.

"Let's go out!" she said hastily.

He was a little taken aback.

"Can't we stay here, Pem? I want a chance to talk to you."

"Not here. We can talk somewhere else. I know a nice little tea room where we can dance."

"I don't want to dance," said he; "and—look here, Pem! I'm a bit hard up, this trip."

She couldn't help kissing him for that.

"As if I cared! We'll take a bus ride, then."

"No, we won't do that, either," said he, half laughing. "We'll stay where we are. I want to talk to you. I—does this suit you, Pem?"

From his pocket he pulled out a ring, carried loose in there, without a box, without even a bit of paper, and laid it in her hand. There it was, honest and unashamed, like himself — the tiniest little diamond. She stared down at it through a veil of tears.

"Best I could do," he said a little forlornly. "You see, I never tried to save my pay, and it's darned small, Pem, old girl. I'm only third mate. I dare say I don't make as much as you do."

"Never mind! That doesn't matter," she answered, so low that he could scarcely hear.

It seemed to her the most touching and beautiful thing that had ever happened, that he should come to her with his poor little ring, so simply and loyally offering her all he had.

"But we can manage," he went on more cheerfully. "I've figured it out. We can take a little flat, you know, and if we're careful, we can get on. You won't mind a pretty quiet life, will you, Pem? Nickie told me you weren't keen on going out and all that. I'm not, either—at least, not now. I was, you know, but not now. We'll settle down—"

He stopped short, looking at her with a faint frown, but she did not meet his eyes. She was shocked, appalled, at her own traitorous thoughts. She glanced again at the ring, and tried in vain to recapture the tenderness and pity she had felt.

To settle down and marry this boy—not to dance with him, not to listen to his lovemaking to the accompaniment of music, in a bright dazzle of light, but to marry him and settle down to a deadly quiet life—she knew very well what that meant. She had often enough been in the sort of little flat they would have to live in. She went into such places when sickness was already there. She had seen all the makeshifts, all the sordid and pitiful anxieties of such existences—people who hadn't enough towels and sheets, who couldn't afford hot water bottles, who couldn't afford even the necessary sunlight.

The quiet life! What had he to do with a quiet life? He had come suddenly into her own chill, somber existence, startling her into youth and gayety—that was why she loved him. A dear, honest, silly boy, to dance with, to be happy with for an evening, but—

"Pem!" he said abruptly. "What's the matter?"

At his peremptory tone, she found it less difficult to speak. She put her hand on his shoulder and spoke as kindly as she could.

"I'm afraid you're going ahead a little too fast," she said. "After all, we've only seen each other once before, you know. Doesn't it seem—"

"Do you mean that you don't care for me?" he interrupted.

His bluntness disconcerted her.

"No," she said, with a trace of impatience; "but we don't really know each other. I think we ought to wait—until we're sure."

He was silent for a long time, searching her downcast face.

"You're sure now, aren't you?" he asked at last. "All right, Pem! All my fault! I might have known—"

And in the face of his sincerity, his honest and unresentful pain, she could give him no false hope, no false consolation, nothing but the truth revealed to him by her silence.

He took the ring from her hand and looked at it with a shadowy smile. Then, before she knew what he was about, he threw it out of the open window into the street.

She came to the window and looked down, but she couldn't see it in the street far below.

"Oh, why did you do that?" she cried. "Why, didn't—"

A sob rose in her throat. She turned away her head, so that he should not see her tears.

"Don't cry!" he said. "It's all my fault. I should have known better, of course. I say, Pem! Please don't cry! The whole thing isn't worth it. Just—let's say good-by, Pem!"

She held out both her hands. After a brief hesitation, he took them in his.

"I'll never forgive myself!" she said unsteadily. "Never!"

"Nothing to forgive," he assured her, with a gallant attempt at a smile. "I—anyhow, I'm glad I ever saw you. Good-by, Pem!"

If it could only have ended then! If he could have gone then, with that moment for them to remember! But it was their great misfortune that no such memory should be left to them.

The doorbell rang, and Nickie came out of her room.

"Shall I go, Pem?" she asked. "Or—"

Pem looked at her helplessly. As the flat was arranged, the front door could not be opened without affording a plain view of the sitting room.

"I'll let it ring," said Nickie, with a fine effect of carelessness. "No one we want to see."

But that was not Pem's way. She came of an austere and stiff-necked family, living secluded on an exhausted little Vermont farm. They had nothing much but pride to keep them warm in winter, to feed and clothe them. Pride was the only heritage that came down to Pem, and pride would not allow her to refuse admission to Mr. Blanchard, no matter what it cost her. As for the possible cost to Arthur Caswell and to Nickie, that didn't occur to her just then.

She opened the door herself.

"I'm afraid I'm a little late," said a courteous, apologetic voice. "Please—"

Then, as he followed Pem inside, he caught sight of the others, and made a general bow.

"This is Mr. Blanchard, Nickie," said Pem.

He looked altogether what Pem had called him—a gentleman through and through. He was a rather slight man in the middle forties, with a sensitive, harassed face, hair a little gray on the temples, and fine, dark eyes. He hadn't in the least a furtive or shamefaced air. Indeed, there was a quiet sort of straightforwardness about him that favorably impressed Nickie, in spite of her prejudice against the man.

"I've heard a great deal about you from Miss Pembroke," he said.

Nickie liked his smile, his voice, his well bred ease. She liked all this, and yet, when Pem presented Caswell to him, her liking was a pain. Arthur seemed so young, so awkward, such an immature and unimpressive creature, in contrast to his senior. She wanted to defend him against comparison. She wanted to force Pem to see, and Mr. Blanchard to see, the splendid qualities in the young sailor.

But she had no chance. Before she could interfere, Blanchard had mentioned that it was growing late. Pem had answered that she was ready, and off they went.

VI

"I WOULD never have told you," said Blanchard. "I would have gone on the best way I could, without you; but now—"

Pem looked at him across the table. By the light of the gold-shaded electric candle his thin face was almost incredibly fine. He looked, she thought, a little inhuman, with his delicate features, his dark, glowing eyes, and the silvery gleam of white on his temples. His tremendous consideration for her, his squeamishness, had made his story such a long one!

After all, she wasn't a girl just out of school.

"I've seen more of life than he has," she reflected; "and yet it has taken him two hours to tell me that his wife is going to divorce him. I suppose it 'll take another hour before he can tell me that he hopes I can marry him when he's free. I suppose it ought to take me a week to answer him!"

She stifled a sigh. It was nonsense for him to try to shield his wife from Pem, who had two months in which to observe her savage egotism. Such a dilemma for his chivalrous soul—to make it clear to Pem that his wife had no just cause for divorcing him, and yet to protect the woman against the implication of cruel unreasonableness. All things considered, he had done very well.

"A—a mutual agreement," he had called it. "I think you'd better not go back," he went on gently. "She's very much upset. Her sister and her mother are with her."

Silence fell between them. The orchestra was playing in a gallery behind them—a gay and delicate air. The rooms were filled with the sort of people Pem liked about her, with light, laughing voices, faint perfumes, and the smoke of cigarettes.

One of Blanchard's hands was extended on the table—a slender hand, beautifully tended. He was so fastidious in everything, so kind, so honorable, so appealing in his masculine assumption of her ignorance and helplessness. He wanted to take care of her and shelter her. He would have been horrified at the thought of her living in a little flat on a third mate's pay. He would have turned pale at the sight of that poor, poor little ring.

"You're very quiet," he said, a little anxiously. "I hope I haven't—"

Pem looked up with a smile.

"No!" she thought, as if defying a voice that had not spoken. "It's no use! I'm not like that. I couldn't stand it. I shall be happy with Everett. It's his kind of life that I want." Aloud she said, in the ladylike, noncommittal tone he expected of her: "I'd better be going back to Nickie now."

Blanchard took her back in a taxi, and all the way he talked of impersonal matters—not a word of love. She knew he wouldn't mention that until he was free to do so honorably.

He left her at the door. She turned as she entered, and saw him standing bareheaded in the street—a handsome and distinguished man, yet somehow pitiful to her, with that touch of white at the temples.

The flat was empty when she got in. Nickie, of course, had gone to her case. Arthur Caswell—she couldn't imagine his destination.

On the kitchen table were the disorderly remains of a tea for two. The sitting room, too, was very untidy, as Nickie always left it. Pem turned on the electric light and began to set it in order. She emptied the ash tray, full of the stubs of those horrible cheap cigarettes she had seen Caswell smoking. She picked up the magazines that lay on the floor, and straightened the chairs.

The piano was open, with music on the rack. She went to close it. The lid slipped from her hand, and, falling, jarred the strings with a queer, trembling discord. She could have imagined it the faint, distant echo of a voice—a young voice.

THE SORROW OF LOVE

ONCE more the old sorrow is upon me—
The sorrow of love. The old friendly years
Cannot save me, their counsel I do not heed;
My eyes are eyes only for one face,
My heart beats only for her footsteps—
On the stairs, oh, belovèd—on the stairs!

Once more I shall ascend into heaven,
Once more I shall pace the floors of hell.
There is no help, for so was I born.
Wise in many things—
Wise with the wisdom of many serpents—
In this I shall never be wise!
Fool of fair faces, till my eyes are closed,
And behold no longer the sun and the stars—
What are they to the face of my belovèd?
Yet would I not exchange my sorrow for king's treasuries.

Richard Leigh

The House of the Wicked

A STORY OF ADVENTURE AND INTRIGUE IN THE FAR EAST

By Eleanor Gates and Frederick Moore

XIV

WHEN Weatherbee returned to his filing, Noakes joined him in the task, working from the corridor side of the wire screening. The girl, wearing a black, ankle-length dress, was keeping watch of the closed tray windows aft.

" Don't take time to file all the way through a wire," was Weatherbee's first suggestion to Noakes. " In one of the cabins we've got a bunch of golf sticks. Just start a break in each wire, and I'll do the rest with the business end of a brassy."

They made rapid progress. Presently they rested. Everywhere in the ship there was absolute quiet, as if not a living soul were aboard her. Weatherbee and Noakes exchanged a grin. The mate's grin was all satisfaction. The other man was amused at the picture that his companion made.

The latter resembled a faithful terrier. Over his eyes hung his dank, drab hair; but that thin, bony face of his, split from side to side, far from appearing homely to Weatherbee, seemed at that moment to wear a strange beauty.

Once more the files worked. When the wires were half cut through, for three feet on the perpendicular, Weatherbee went for the clubs, and used them on the weakened strands with good effect. No blows were struck, but the clubs were used to wrench the wires in two, until a straight opening was made all the way down to the deck.

Next, both on their feet, the men began to file horizontally at shoulder height in the direction of Stone. As fast as a wire was half severed, a golf club, with other wires for leverage, broke it through. Thus went on, feverishly, and with no unnecessary word, the alternate filing and breaking.

The horizontal cutting done, Weatherbee, using all his strength, pushed with his body against the rectangle of heavy woven material. It gave, swinging outward stiffly, and he went through, fetching with him a folded deck chair, into which, still without speaking, the two placed Stone.

Then they began their filing on the screened wall on the opposite side of the corridor. By this time they had evolved a sort of technique in their labor. Ellice Loring brought them each a glass of water. They gulped it down, but refused the biscuits she offered. Their first consideration was her liberty.

Soon two sides of a rectangle were cut through, and the second mat of wire was pulled outward and tied back. However, they urged the newly freed prisoner not to leave her compartment.

" Keep out of the line of fire," Weatherbee warned. " The corridor is the risky place. We have nothing to do now but stand guard, so you won't be needed. Please keep back, and, if firing begins, lie down."

Then, standing shoulder to shoulder, but watching in opposite directions, the two men held a whispered conference. Noakes was for quick action, urging that they must not wait until the water supply was exhausted; nor was it desirable to let the present situation stand through another night.

" I agree absolutely," Weatherbee told him; " not only for the reasons you give, but for another—and it's a grave one. Have you noticed Mr. Houghton? His nerves are ready to snap. Right now he's jabbering to himself. Noakes, if he can't have relief from this strain, we're going to have a sick man on our hands."

" What's our first move, then?" the mate inquired.

" I think we ought to come to terms with Markin and Blodgett. They're sitting up

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there waiting for us. We're waiting down here for them. Isn't it the Good Book that says something about vultures staying where their carrion is? Our friends outside are the vultures. They'll never go back to Manila with gossip about this terrible business floating around; but before they strike for foreign parts, they'll want some of Stone's money. While we've got him, we're safe from the dynamite."

Again Houghton was talking to himself in a low monotone. Noakes shook a dubious head.

"Bargain, Mr. Weatherbee," he urged.

Weatherbee went to crouch in front of Stone.

"Your game is up," he told him. "Yatin, one of the Malays you left in this ship got away, managed to return to Manila, and went to a friend of Mr. Houghton's."

Stone's bald head wabbled.

"Yatin — in — Manila?" he repeated slowly.

"Not a dream of yours," Weatherbee returned. "Mr. Houghton's friend has Yatin and Dow in the same bungalow. That's how Noakes came to be here. That's how he came to hand Markin a forged letter. Try to realize this—Manila knows the whole story."

Stone swallowed.

"That means, whether we live or whether we die, you can never go back there and be free. To-day, there's just one thing you can save out of the mess you've made of things. You can't save your money, or your reputation, or your friends—just your miserable life."

The millionaire did not speak for a moment. He appeared to be overwhelmed. He lowered his swimming eyes to the matting, until his little pointed beard rested on the silk pleats of his shirt bosom.

He roused himself when Ellice Loring came to stand in front of him, and lifted his chin to show his teeth at her in a leer of hate.

"How strange!" she said to him, her voice even and cold. "You've always been able to buy your way into, and out of, everything; but now your money isn't any good!"

She laughed mirthlessly. He did not answer her, but seemed to be thinking.

For a moment she waited, looking down at him, her manner calm—though, as Weatherbee knew, she was only outwardly calm. In those black eyes, burning now as he had never before seen them burn, was the glow of an overwhelming satisfaction. He understood it. She was more free than she had been for what had been to her a lifetime, while her tormentor was a helpless prisoner.

"Give me a pistol, Mr. Weatherbee," she said quietly.

At that, the millionaire writhed in his chair.

"She wants to murder me, Mr. Weatherbee," he declared. "If you give her a pistol, and she kills me, my blood will be on your hands!"

She laughed again scornfully.

"Oh, the coward!" she taunted. "A man is bad enough when he's a villain; but to be a cowardly villain! No wonder he could lock us up in this ship without hearing one word of explanation, or getting one thing against us! The cruel are *always* cowards! You despicable creature!"

As before, Stone addressed Weatherbee.

"If she kills me, you won't have a chance of getting out of here alive—not one of you! Mind what I tell you! Money's the only thing that 'll make Markin and Captain Blodgett come to terms. If I'm dead, and they can't gain anything from me, they'll kill every last one of you, and get away with the schooner and the yacht!"

"Mr. Weatherbee," the girl interposed, with quiet determination, "I'm satisfied to go if he must go too."

"If we have to go," Weatherbee answered, "we'll certainly take him along."

Until now he had not thought of searching Stone for firearms. Finding in a hip pocket a small automatic with an ornate handle, he handed it to her.

In spite of the argument he had just given them, Stone was plainly apprehensive as to what she might do with the weapon.

"I—I need a stimulant," he whispered huskily to Weatherbee. "These ropes hurt me. I—I want to lie down."

Once more she laughed.

"The baby act," she told Weatherbee.

He shared her uncomplimentary estimate of Stone's tactics.

"Now give me your close attention," he said to the millionaire. "What we want is to get out of the Tai-Lan. Your hired men upstairs have the bulge on us, but you heard what I said through the port to Markin, and what I said just now. I mean every word of it. If we don't get away safe, *you* don't get away with your life. You must decide in the next two minutes whether you want to live or die!"

Stone had a question.

"What did Markin mean about blowing up the ship?"

From out of the dimness where Noakes was watchfully crouched there came a grunt of anger and disgust.

"Say!" exploded the mate. "If the old duck ain't trying to make us believe that he didn't order that clockwork!"

"I don't know of any clockwork," protested the millionaire hotly. "Clockwork for what?"

Weatherbee briefly explained the so-called "insurance."

"And it's hardly likely," he concluded, "that there's a lot of explosives in the hold unless your money paid for them, and you ordered them put there. The clockwork is the apex of deviltry, and, now that we've got you in our hands, I don't wonder you deny the whole vile business!"

Stone had been shaking his head all the while.

"I didn't buy any powder or dynamite," he reiterated. "So help me God, I didn't! I know my life is in your hands. I'm not lying to you. This talk of clockwork's all new to me. You see how comfortably this saloon is arranged. Houghton and my wife can't deny they've been well treated; and I didn't have to fear about the desertion of the men who were in on the secret, or about their telling on me. I was paying every one of them more than handsomely. I was—"

Weatherbee cut him short.

"Doesn't matter who put the dynamite in the hold," he asserted, "so long as you paid for the job. That makes you responsible. Yatin said it's there, and I'm dead sure it's there. It's a danger every second. We want to get away from it, and so do you; so you'd better coöperate with us."

"What do you want me to do?"

"In the first place," Weatherbee answered, "I want you to tell them that a single bullet aimed against us will be your death. That's the first thing you must tell them."

"And put some kick into what you say, old feller," broke in Noakes. "It's the solemn truth—one shot from that pair, and it's ta-ta for you!"

"We want Markin to come down, with his hands in the air," Weatherbee continued. "Before he starts, we want Blodgett to tie Markin's hands."

"He'll never do that," Stone complained fretfully. "You're demanding what's utterly unreasonable!"

"Next," added Weatherbee, "we want Blodgett to come down, with his hands up."

"He won't consent, either. It's sheer lunacy to ask such a thing!"

"Aw, cut that stuff!" ordered Noakes. "You make things happen for us, and you make 'em happen *pronto!* If any trick is pulled on us, I'll skin the hide off your mean little body!"

"You'll come with me to the foot of the stairs," directed Weatherbee. "I'll have a gun pointed straight at your head; so don't try to get away, will you?"

"What do you intend to do to Markin and my captain?"

"Leave them here, nicely trussed, and tell the men of the Lillebonne to come and get them when the Arcadia, with the five of us aboard, is hull down on the horizon."

"I'm to go with *you?*"

"With us."

"You're going to let them go scot-free, and hold me up to abuse and shame? It isn't just!"

"He talks of justice!" Ellice Loring exclaimed bitterly.

"You're the man we're after," Weatherbee said. "You took men who were more or less helpless because they were in your power, and compelled them to do your dirty work. That's why we're going to give them a chance for their freedom—if they play straight with us. But you—"

He paused significantly. Stone began to storm at him.

"Oh, all right! You've got me, haven't you? Four against one old man! It's contemptible! To make me bargain for my life!"

"You gave *me* no chance to bargain!" reminded Ellice Loring. "A rich, powerful old man against a helpless, ignorant, broken-hearted girl!"

He lifted his red-rimmed eyes to her.

"Ellice," he quavered, "if you'll forgive me, and let me go away with Markin and the captain, I'll turn most of my money over to you."

"Money! Money! Money!" she retorted. "Money can *never* make this right. There's nothing that can make up for what you've done to me. If you had gone crazy with jealousy and killed me with this pistol—well, that would have been human, I suppose, even if it was undeserved; but deliberately to have this saloon made ready as a living tomb for Will Houghton and me!"

Houghton shot to his feet, and they heard him mumble to himself; but he did not turn, and presently sat again. Then they heard him laugh.

"Stone," resumed Weatherbee, "your appealing to this mistreated young woman isn't going to help you. I don't intend to have any more delay. Will you do what I've told you to do, or won't you?"

"Yes!" blurted the millionaire, and cursed under his breath.

"Good!"

"But give me a drink, will you?" pleaded Stone.

"No—we haven't any water to spare. However, there's plenty in the ship. You'll get some of it when we're in command, and not a second before."

"All right! All right!" Stone replied irritably. "You'll have to untie my feet."

Weatherbee loosened the piece of rope that bound the millionaire ankle to ankle. Then he helped Stone to stand.

"Walk to the foot of the stairs," he instructed, "and call up. Make it clear to them that we'll punish treachery instantly. Second, point out that your life is in our hands. Third, explain how they're to come down, and what our intentions are as regards them. Now, get along!"

Stone ground his teeth, but he moved down the corridor—slowly, as if he were stiffened from being tied. Weatherbee walked directly behind him, keeping watch ahead over that bald pate.

Its owner did not wait until the bottom step was reached before shouting loudly for Markin.

"Nick!" he called. "Captain Blodgett! Come and hear what I've got to say! Hey, up there, you two! Where are you, I say? Get on the job!"

The skipper's voice answered:

"What's wanted, chief?"

"These people," Stone replied, "inform me that Yatin got away and Dow is a prisoner in Manila. This mate, Noakes, that you shipped, is Houghton's best friend. Right now, in Manila, the whole story is public property—and that's what I get out of trusting the pair of you!"

At that, two voices mingled in an exclamation that told of dismay and horror.

"You know what that means," the millionaire added. "You two can't go back. You must get away."

Weatherbee gently touched the gray-covered shoulder with the stubby barrel of his automatic.

"Don't drag this thing," he warned. "You get over the stuff I told you to—not information for them!"

The next moment he understood, and not without dismay and horror of his own, that he had made a grave mistake in admitting to Stone that the true story of the Tai-Lan's whereabouts had gained publicity, and in thus cutting off the millionaire from all hope; for the latter, speaking to Markin and Blodgett again, had that to say which Weatherbee felt would surely spell the end of them all.

With a forward step, Stone shouted his words:

"Boys! Boys! Before you get away, *blow this damned ship up!*"

XV

WEATHERBEE clamped a hand over Stone's mouth, but the old man's smothered yells went on:

"Blow it up—me with it! Won't go back — Bilibid Prison — die first! Nick! Blow—"

It was Noakes who, darting forward, jerked the millionaire off his feet, dragged him down the corridor, and, as if he had been a sack of meal, tossed him back into the folding chair.

"You tricky old rattlesnake!" he cried, scarlet with rage. "I'm goin' to kill you for that!"

Stone, panting with excitement, glared up at him malevolently.

"I'm glad to go!" he shouted. "I'll take every one of you with me! Turn loose your dynamite, Markin! I've got 'em where I want 'em! I can't go back—neither can they! Let the thing go, Blodgett! Let it go-o-o-o!"

His voice broke into a shrill, triumphant cackle.

"You'll get somethin' worse 'n blowin' up!" vowed the furious mate. "What did we promise you if you played us dirt?" He shook Stone as if he were shaking a rat. "I'm goin' to skin you alive! I'm goin' to start in right now!"

Noakes stuffed a hand into a breeches pocket, but Weatherbee, halting beside him, interposed.

"No, no!" he said hurriedly. "Wait! Shut him up."

Back he ran then, to the foot of the companionway, taking care to keep close to a wire wall.

Stone broke out once more.

"Better blow us up, Markin! They know you killed a man in Shanghai! They'll see that you hang! They'll—"

"Darn your hide, I'll stop your jabber!" growled Noakes.

Around his own waist was a stringy length of gray cloth that served him as a cummerbund. With it he bound Stone's mouth. Then, using the rope once more, he tied the old man, by his knees and his elbows, to the folding chair.

"There you stay till I send you where you can't come back," he added. "So just take your last look at the scenery, won't you? The next place you're goin' to 'll be even hotter 'n this!"

Houghton was still seated by the table. Though he continued to watch the stairs, he seemed not to have heard Stone's treacherous order, or seen the millionaire dragged away by the mate. Constantly he whispered to himself. Occasionally he chuckled aloud.

Ellice Loring was laughing, too. She came to stand in front of Stone.

"He surprises me," she confessed. "I never would have thought he had enough spirit in his base little body to face being blown up!"

From where he was standing, Weatherbee could hear Markin and the skipper talking at one and the same time—proof that Stone's orders had stirred them. So that the pair could catch what he said, Weatherbee now called back to the girl and Noakes.

"They won't blow us up," he asserted, as if fully confident. "They know that what I've told them is so. If Stone dies, how'll they get theirs? Ha-a-a! He's only valuable to them if he's alive, and they're more worried about his safety than we are. I dare them to do any blowing!"

"Mr. Weatherbee!" It was the voice of Markin, his tone mollifying once more. "The captain and me, we *are* worried about the chief. He must be off his head. Why, he *knows* we wouldn't let anything happen to him! Tell him we don't mean to desert him—not for a minute!"

"Not until you've had some cash, eh?" Weatherbee bantered pointedly.

But they were not to be taunted into admitting that they would forsake Stone under any circumstances.

"We want to get the boss out of his fix," spoke up Blodgett. "Name your proposition."

"To begin with," Weatherbee answered, "I want to say a word or two about your getting away with either vessel, or both. Don't try it. It would mean disaster. This story has been wirelessed from Manila to every ship on the Eastern seas, and to every radio station on the globe. Right now the yacht and the Lillebonne are being hunted."

Blodgett spoke again.

"I'm not exactly a fool, Mr. Weatherbee," he said dryly. "We know we'd run into a coast guard. We don't even think of jumping out — honest, we don't. We want to do the decent thing. I've got a family, I have. I can't give up the sea and stop supporting 'em just because Mr. Stone has had troubles with Mrs. Stone."

"Now you're talking!" returned Weatherbee. "As I understand it, what you'd both like is a ship to get away in, a good sum to take with you, and the absolute assurance that you won't be brought up short and arrested. Am I right?"

"You've got it about right," said Blodgett, and Markin threw in his assent eagerly; but, as if it were a second thought, Blodgett added: "How about Mr. Stone, though?"

"When we're aboard the yacht," said Weatherbee, "you can send a boat, and Mr. Stone will go back to you in it."

"So far, so good," Markin called down; "but if he was to fall sick, and we lost him—"

"We'll give you a letter which we'll all sign," went on Weatherbee. "In it we'll commend you both for your past services, and so on. With it you shall have a bill of sale for the Lillebonne, signed by Mr. Stone and Mrs. Stone."

At that, the millionaire began to twist and murmur his protests, all the while shaking his head vigorously. It was evident that he would sign nothing unless forcibly compelled.

"That 'll do!" warned Noakes. "If I give you a taste of my foot, there won't be no slipper on it—it 'll be inside a shoe!"

Markin replied to Weatherbee's plan.

"But," he argued, "Mrs. Stone is supposed to be dead. She went down in the

Tai-Lan. If she signed, nobody'd believe it, and we'd be snagged."

"All right, then," answered Weatherbee. "Stone will sign it alone."

"If you force him to sign"—it was Blodgett who spoke—"will the bill of sale be legal? And who's going to witness it, and stand by *that?* Who's—"

"Blast you for a brace of sea lawyers!" Noakes roared at them. "Can't we wireless from the yacht that Mrs. Stone's alive, and that Stone give you the Lilly? Of all the gall! You offer 'em a fortune, Mr. Weatherbee, and they hum and haw!"

"Not at a-a-all!" Markin denied. "But look here—it'll take money to pay off the schooner's crew, and to pay port charges in case we make any ports of call, and to provision her. We can't get hung up for want of cash. The chief might come aboard us sick, and we want to be sure we can get what we want. Do we get it?"

"You do," agreed Weatherbee.

"It's a go!" Blodgett answered back. "Give us what we want, and we'll shove off in the dinghy five minutes from now. That'll leave you the longboat."

"You'll surely play fair with us?" asked Weatherbee. "When you've got what you want, do you mean to keep your word?"

"We'll keep our word, all right," Blodgett promised. "Don't we all want to get out of this mess—you one way, we the other? Ain't you got the chief? If we don't play straight, it 'll go hard with him, won't it? We're thinking of him. We want to do our best for him."

"I wonder!" exclaimed Weatherbee. "How do we know that you'll do your best for him *after* you've got all you want? You might let him blow up."

Now Markin's voice took on an injured tone.

"We let the ship blow up with Mr. Stone? You mean to say you don't trust us to treat *him* square?"

"Don't trust you to treat anybody square," Weatherbee replied coolly; "not even each other."

"But what could we gain if we was to act crooked?" demanded the captain.

"You'd gain extra money—big money—if you could get him out safe and finish us off."

After that, for a time, there was no more conversing between social hall and dining saloon; but from above, to those waiting in the dimness below, came the voices of Markin and the skipper. They were arguing, low and excitedly.

Presently, as if he had heard them and was growing impatient, Houghton sprang up out of his chair for a second time. However, as if he had changed his mind, he immediately sat down again. Weatherbee noted that the elder man was breathing hard.

The incident helped to increase Weatherbee's impatience.

"There's no use backing and filling," he told the two overhead. "Here's what's got to happen—Markin, let the skipper tie your hands. Then hoist them over your head, and come down. The captain is to get into the dinghy next, and pull out to where we can see him. Then, Markin, before we give you the letter, or the bill of sale, or anything else, you've got to show me how to run that clockwork. You've got to stay with me in the hand-wheel house until I'm dead certain that what you've taught me is correct."

Markin's answer was made with a great pretense of earnestness:

"Now, Mr. Weatherbee! You don't ask me to come down there with my hands tied, do you? You'd nab me. It would mean Bilibid Prison for life. Why, I'd be a fool to do what you ask! What could Blodgett, here, do by himself? No, you can't call that plan fair; but if you folks mean what you're saying, what's the matter with one of you coming up here? You're three to us two. Also, you got Mr. Stone, so you got a hostage, and we ain't. We *can't* play you crooked. We *got* to learn you the insurance machine. When that's O. K., you hand us what you just promised, and we'll sheer off, to wait for the chief."

As Weatherbee half turned away from the steps, here was Houghton on his feet once more. To the surprise of the former, he beckoned Weatherbee to join him at the opening in the wire netting. When they came together there, he appeared to be in his usual quiet, self-contained state of mind.

"Is he smoldering?" Weatherbee asked himself. "Or has he actually got his nerves in hand?"

"I see Markin's point of view," Houghton said. "I suggest that one of us go up to be taught that mechanism."

Weatherbee hesitated. He remembered how double-faced the commander of the Tai-Lan had proved to be in his own case. He feared treachery. If one of their three were cut down, then the numerical odds would no longer be in favor of those in the saloon, and the possibility of victory would be greatly lessened.

On the other hand, it was Houghton who had endured this prison so long. How could a man who had been locked up in it for only one night refuse to take a step that might free them all? Moreover, now that the elder man was restored to his poise of the evening before, Weatherbee dreaded to refuse any wish of his, or reject any proposal.

Houghton was watching the other's face.

" It's the only reasonable step," he added, gently argumentative.

" I'll go," said Weatherbee.

At once there was strong objection, not solely on the part of Houghton and Noakes, but also from Ellice Loring.

" I sponsored this move," Houghton pointed out. " If there's any risk involved, I ought to take it. I can't see the job loaded upon another's man's shoulders."

Weatherbee would not consent.

" Impossible for you to go," he declared. " Your eyes won't stand the glare of the light up there."

" Don't make me feel as if I'd started a war," pleaded Houghton, " and then stationed myself at a mahogany desk!"

" Can't help it. What's the use of your going, Houghton, if you're blind and helpless when you get there?"

Houghton's retort was a strange one. However, it was not until several hours afterward that Weatherbee was able to understand the full significance of the other's attitude.

" If I can't go up there," Houghton asserted, " then nobody ought to go—nobody. Anyhow, I could put off going until after sunset."

" We don't want to stay here another night, old man."

" Sure we don't," Noakes concurred; " but, Mr. Weatherbee, this job is for me, Mr. Houghton's eyes bein' like they are."

" You've got a family," Weatherbee countered. " I haven't."

" I got a family," admitted the mate, " but I'm goin' to do this anyhow. Remember, I'm the only one of the lot down here that's got what you might call an official position. I'm mate of the Lillebonne, and Blodgett knows that if I'm killed, somebody's got to answer for it. Somebody's got to stand up and say *why*."

Weatherbee saw that there were tears in Ellice Loring's eyes.

" I don't want any of you to go," she told him. " I'm afraid. I feel it won't turn out right. Oh, I know you're all thinking of me, but I can't have anybody sacrifice himself! *Please* don't trust those men!"

" I'm sorry to see you so troubled," Weatherbee told her, " when I'm sure we're all overemphasizing the risk. They've *got* to play straight with us, those two. Haven't we got Stone?"

" Mr. Weatherbee," she answered, " they'd shoot you down, and feel certain that we wouldn't shoot him down. Oh, I know how that kind of person, who hasn't any sense of honor, depends on *your* sense of honor, and your decency and humanity. Don't trust them!"

" You and me'll draw straws," broke in the mate, speaking to Weatherbee; " or wires, or slivers, or whatever we got layin' around. That 'll settle the question."

" Good idea!" Weatherbee exclaimed. " Houghton, take a couple of your playing cards, and mark one. Miss Loring, we'll turn away while you lay them face down for us. The man who gets the marked one—"

As the cards were placed in the girl's hands, he noticed that she was deadly pale. Knowing how apprehensive she was, and being eager to get done with the strain, he turned away hastily, taking Noakes with him.

She dropped to the matting and laid the cards face down.

" Ready!" she announced huskily.

She remained on her knees, staring at the bits of pasteboard.

" You draw first, Mr. Weatherbee," said the mate.

Weatherbee stooped, picked up a card, turned it over, and laid it down again.

" Tuh!" he breathed.

He had drawn the blank.

" Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Noakes, plainly delighted.

In another instant he held up the marked card in triumph.

As if she were about to faint, the girl swayed sidewise. Weatherbee bent quickly and lifted her to her feet. As he held her firmly, she looked up at him, her lips trembling pitifully, though she was trying to smile.

" We'll be out of this soon," he told her reassuringly. "Keep up your courage a little longer. Trust us!"

"Lady" — Noakes, a weapon in either hand, was pausing for one moment to say a final word to her—"I'm mighty glad I'm doin' this clockwork job. If anything happens, you can spare me a lot better'n you can spare Mr. Weatherbee."

He nodded, traversed the corridor in a series of long, scuffing steps, halted at the foot of the companionway, laid his firearms on the bottom step, gave another laugh, a backward toss of his long hair, and took the stairs two at a time.

XVI

THE mate's lanky body rose beyond the range of those who were left watching. Next, only his gangling legs could be seen, and then only the bare feet in the slippers. When he seemed to be pausing for a moment, close to the top, those below heard the report of a revolver, and a choking cry that was his.

He sank to the step on which he was standing, turned, crouching, and began his descent, his body doubled, his left hand steadying and supporting him. On his breast, where his sweated white shirt clung, there was a small crimson spot.

The three in the dining saloon echoed his cry — in pity, horror, dismay, fear, and anger.

He shook his head at them, waved them to stay where they were, straightened at the foot of the staircase, picked up the pistols he had left behind him, and started back. He reeled slightly, but the display of strength he was making led the others to hope that, after all, he had not been mortally wounded.

Weatherbee met him, and saw how bloodless was that bony, bristling face; yet a smile showed the gap in the mate's teeth—a curious smile, however, like that of a man who is enjoying a joke which is, for the present, solely his own.

"Light made a glare in my eyes," he explained, whispering. "I brung up, and—Markin got me."

For a little while he fought to keep his feet, his arms hanging limply, but his weapons still gripped in his long fingers. Then he allowed Weatherbee and Houghton to lower him to the deck, where he sat with his back against a wire wall. His face was toward Stone.

To stanch the mate's wound, Houghton tore away a sleeve of his own shirt, doubled the cloth, and held it against the slowly heaving chest. Weatherbee went for water and towels. The girl knelt to brush the long, drab hair out of those yellowish eyes.

"Lady," he said to her, "would you go and play on the piano for me? Wish you'd play 'How Firm a Foundation,' and play it loud. *You* know—good and strong on the bass part, man fashion. Sing it, too."

"Yes!"

She was up and into her side of the saloon on the instant. Then through the big, dim room, in marching rhythm, the music of the hymn began to pour:

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say—"

Weatherbee came back, but Noakes would not drink. He was staring at Stone.

"You folks 'll need every drop of water you got," he declared.

His expression caused Weatherbee to glance toward the old man. He saw that, above the windings of the mate's stringy cummerbund, the millionaire's milky-glue eyes were laughing.

Ellice Loring was singing on:

"Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed!
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid.
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to
stand—"

Suddenly the mate's right arm was no longer limp. It lifted aimlessly. In the right hand was an automatic that wavered.

To Weatherbee it seemed, for that second, that Noakes was blindly trying to hand some one his weapon; but that was not the mate's intention. With one supreme drain upon his waning strength, he lifted his arm level with his shoulder, straightened it, and fired—twice.

Stone's eyes started, and he jerked backward from the double impact. A few feet away, with the piano and her own soaring voice to drown the sound of the shots, Ellice Loring, newly widowed, but not knowing it, bent intently over her keys and swept the marching hymn onward:

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."

She stopped.

"How is he?" she asked under her breath.

Getting no answer, she came hurrying out again.

Noakes was whispering.

"They was told plain enough that if they shot at us, we'd kill him. They think our bark is worse'n our bite; but it ain't. Lady, he was tied, and I wasn't armed—that makes things even, don't it? Anyhow, as the Malays say, he was one of the pig tribe."

She did not understand, and did not look to where Stone was slumped in the chair, his chin once more on his breast.

"Lady," the dying mate went on, "I want to ask if you'll say to Mr. Bradley that I done my best, and will he please remember Nettie and the—the kid?"

"I'll tell him. I thank you for all you've done with my whole heart. I'll remember your wife and baby. I'll do everything I can for them—believe that!"

Around his mouth was a curious little pleased quirk.

"Fine!" he pronounced. "And so, like some general once said, I can die happy. You're rich, lady—"

"I don't want his money!"

"You earned it these last fourteen months," Noakes reminded her. "So take it; and you won't mind me sayin' that this time you've sure picked a good man—the right one. That's O. K., and now—Stone's gone, and—I'll—fol-low—"

It was then that she got a hint of the truth. She turned toward Stone, saw, understood, and backed away a few feet. Against a wire partition she halted, breathless and stunned.

Noakes did not speak again. The pale lashes dropped slowly to rest upon his thin cheeks. His lips met, but lifted at either end in a faint smile. He gave a last sigh.

Weatherbee pocketed the mate's weapons, then took Houghton aside.

"Our situation has changed for the worse in these last five minutes," he said soberly. "We've lost one pair of hands and our hostage; but we've still got a chance for our lives, if we can keep Stone's death a secret."

Houghton threw back his head and burst into a gale of laughter.

XVII

Weatherbee turned back to where the girl was standing, rigid, as if the shock of the double tragedy had robbed her of motion. As he halted beside her, poignant and stressful as was that moment, he was startled by the beauty of her face. An oval of delicately chiseled marble, it was more than ever like the face of some high-born girl of the Middle Ages. Once more he had the feeling that all this that was happening was unreal—the dream of some hideously cruel plot.

He gently touched her arm. Without turning her eyes toward him, she began to whisper:

"I didn't deserve my punishment. Oh, I didn't! He knows that now; but I never wanted him to pay like that—without warning, without a chance to repent!"

He took a small hand that was waxen, holding it firmly.

"You couldn't be harsh to anybody," he said soothingly. "You're everything that's kind and good. You mustn't suffer because that old man has gone as he has. Poor Noakes was thinking of you. He wanted to set you free. You are free. Have you thought of that?"

She shook her head.

"No, I—I hadn't thought. I'm free! How strange that I didn't think of it!"

"Not strange," he declared; "because there was never in your thoughts the wish to get yourself free through Stone's death. You couldn't even think death for your worst enemy."

Her face softened, and she turned brimming eyes to Weatherbee.

"How kind all that sounds!" she said. "I like to hear you say it."

"We don't know how matters are going to turn out," he went on. "There are other things I want to say to you while I can. First, I must thank you for what you did for me."

She was puzzled.

"For you?"

"What Noakes got is what I would have got if I'd gone up. You were right about them. You told us they wouldn't play straight. As far as you could, you tried to save me from being shot down."

"I'm the cause of your being here in this danger."

"Thank God that I'm on hand to fight for you! And I want to tell you how proud I am, and how terribly happy I am, to know that you cared about my safety."

She nodded.

"Yes, I care," she acknowledged. "Every moment I pray that we shall succeed in getting away from here safely together. Am I wicked to do that, with this man dead here, in sight of me?"

"You don't owe him any loyalty," Weatherbee answered.

"And—and I long for a little happiness again!"

"If we come through this alive, I'll spend the rest of my life making you happy."

"I'll think of that. It 'll keep up my courage."

"Markin and Blodgett mustn't even guess what has happened," Weatherbee told her. "They must believe that Stone is alive, and that we hold the whip hand. If you didn't hear those two shots, then they didn't. Will you go in and play again?"

As obediently as a child, she returned to the piano. She played a vivacious gavot, followed it with a Chopin polonaise, and then swept into a gay two-step.

While the music continued, Weatherbee went to lean over the mate. He took both weapons from the hold of those long, thin fingers, and laid flat the angular body in its faded gingham shirt and dungaree trousers. Once he had thought this figure like some awful caricature. He had hated the sight of this countenance, which now, calm and serenely smiling, was so singularly ennobled by death.

The music changed to a spirited march. The stirring rhythm brought Houghton to his feet, so abruptly that Weatherbee felt a new and overwhelming disquiet. Now, in their great extremity, was Houghton about to prove himself a danger to his companions in distress?

"Or perhaps he'll rush up and out," Weatherbee thought, "and get himself shot."

The elder man had a pistol in either hand, but what he did was only grotesque. Without leaving his station at the table, he fell to exercising himself—first his arms, then his whole body, bending this way and that.

The music stopped. He sat, laid his automatic down, smoothed at his hair, and looked about him as if the table were circled by diners.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began affably, and stopped.

"Yes," said Weatherbee. "What is it, Mr. Houghton?"

"Nothing!"

But immediately he was speaking again: "Treachery—the very worst kind of treachery! Well, talk won't settle it. No, my friends, talk won't settle it."

He gestured with both hands.

The piano was playing once more, and now the music was low and lulling. Weatherbee recognized the strains of an old cradle song.

"What a wonder of a girl!" he said to himself. "What a clever idea! And if only it 'll work!"

To a certain extent, it did. As the melody progressed, Ellice's low, rich voice joining in with the piano, Houghton let his eyes fall to the matting. Presently he planted both elbows on the board, cupped his hands, and rested his face in them.

Understanding that the girl was aware of Houghton's condition, Weatherbee now determined to speak to her about it, since a failure to be frank in this particular matter might cause her to feel that other important things were being hidden from her. Such a feeling might fill her mind with unfounded fears, when there were enough actual perils to be faced.

He came to her.

"You've noticed Mr. Houghton?" he asked.

Ellice continued to play softly as she replied.

"Yes," she said sorrowfully. "He has kept up all this long time, and he has kept me up. I've probably leaned on him harder than I ever intended to. It has told on him. Also, he's naturally proud, and to be misjudged and mistreated has weighed on his heart. The first time I noticed that he was different was when poor Noakes whistled to us. Since then it has been a steady, gradual collapse. He's half crazy now."

"Raving a while back," Weatherbee assented. "Poor old fellow—a dead game sport, and every inch a gentleman! If he lives, he's probably in for a long siege of brain trouble. This kind of music helps him. Keep it going. I've got to build a barricade."

He built it out of folding chairs—a waist-high pile placed near to the foot of the stairs. To make it more bullet-proof, he layered it with blankets, and with Houghton's many suits of clothes. From time to time he paused long enough to make sure that Markin and Blodgett were still arguing overhead.

The barrier completed, Weatherbee noticed that Houghton was looking out at it. Presently the elder man came to stand close to the wire screen. His face was drawn. A heavy fold of skin showed at either side of his mouth, as between his parted lips his clenched teeth were revealed in a weird smile. Despite the close heat of the saloon, that smile made Weatherbee shiver.

"Take it easy for a while," he pleaded. "You know you've been down in this hole so long, and it has taxed you."

Houghton's eyes avoided his.

"Rest isn't for me until this affair is finished," he returned.

He spoke quietly enough, but his tone showed that a terrible anger was consuming him, and making self-control difficult. Weatherbee thought it best to continue their conversation.

"I suppose we ought to get poor Noakes and the old man into one of the cabins on your side," he observed.

Houghton's brows knitted.

"No, that would take the two of us, and while we were busy we might be fired on."

"You're right."

Weatherbee was glad to be able to agree. He recalled that it is not wise to oppose a man who is on the brink of frenzy.

"What a foul thing they did to that good lad!" Houghton exclaimed. "Set a deliberate trap! Never intended to keep their word! Enticed him up and shot him down as if he were some stray dog!"

"Cold-blooded!" Once more Weatherbee hastened to concur. "Well, now we know that they will give no quarter, so neither shall we."

"Thank you for saying that," returned the other. "I've been afraid you might insist on ethics during the coming fracas."

Houghton gazed straight at his companion. His eyes were open, eager, inflamed.

"They probably know for sure that they hit Noakes," Weatherbee went on. "They can't be certain he was seriously hurt. With the piano going, they surely won't think he's dead. As a wounded enemy is a bad proposition to deal with, I fancy they'll go slow for a bit."

"And not talk bargain again."

"Not right away. They can afford to sit tight and play a waiting game. Time is on their side. They know we have some water. They also know that we're bound to run out of it. Then we'll go after them, or give up. What I'm counting on, though, is that they won't want Stone to die."

"They won't care, if it brings about our surrender."

"Surrender means death," said Weatherbee. "They'd never leave us here as prisoners, because they couldn't afford to do it; and they'd never turn us loose. They shot Noakes because their one idea is to clean us out."

Houghton drew a deep breath.

"If only we could lure them down!"

"What do you say if we beg them for water—for Stone?"

"That wouldn't fetch 'em."

"Would you mind if I tried?"

"Go ahead."

"I just want to see how they'll act," Weatherbee explained. "Can't do any harm, and it 'll make 'em think we're harder pressed than we are."

He signaled the piano to stop.

From behind the heaped-up chairs Weatherbee began a second parley with their enemies.

"Markin!" he shouted. "Blodgett! You up there! I want to speak to you!"

"Yes, Mr. Second Mate," Blodgett answered. "What is it you want to say? Sing out!"

"So you're still sober!" Weatherbee retorted boldly. "Well, I want to say that we're out of water. Your employer hasn't had a drop since he came down. He, and all of us, must have some. He's about down and out already."

"Short o' water, eh?" remarked the captain. "Well, *you* don't sound thirsty, and neither does our musical young lady; but we can spare you some, I guess. Come up and get it!"

"I think I won't do that," said Weatherbee, as if good-naturedly entering into the ghastly joke. "Suppose you send some down!"

"Right-oh! By the way, Mr. Second Mate, how's our friend Noakes? You know, I didn't mean to hurt him bad. I was just trying to scare him."

"He isn't hurt badly," Weatherbee lied cheerfully. "It's more his feelings than anything else. The bullet made a flesh wound; but it certainly got under his skin in more ways than one."

"He's cross about it, eh?"

"Pretty cross."

"All right, sonny! We'll send you down some *agua* in a jiffy. We can't let Mr. Stone want for drink."

"Thanks!"

For Houghton, as he came back, he had a word:

"The piano did more than conceal the shot. It actually fooled them into thinking that Noakes wasn't badly hurt."

Houghton swung his head solemnly.

"How wonderful of the poor lad!" he marveled. "He thought of covering the sound of his pistol, even though he was mortally stricken!"

After that, for half an hour or more, the men were silent. Believing that the piano was responsible for Houghton's apparent restoration to his normal condition, Weatherbee signed to the girl, begging her to resume her playing. As the men sat there, watching and pondering the situation, through the big, ill lighted saloon stole the soothing, comforting, homely strains of old songs—"The Suwanee River," "Kathleen Mavourneen," and "The Old Folks at Home."

Suddenly the three were startled by the sound of a crash, evidently the breaking of glass. The sound came from the social hall. It brought the piano to an abrupt stop, and drove the two men back into the deeper shadows, their pistols ready.

"They're smashing in a port," Weatherbee hazarded.

"H-m!" rumbled Houghton.

Bent far forward, as if ready and impatient for conflict, his shoulders rose and fell with his quick breathing.

Presently the reason for the crash of glass was made plain. Following a dull thud at the head of the staircase, a dark green quart bottle came falling into sight from step to step. Beside it, frolicking and romping in gay pursuit, appeared a black and white kitten.

Together, bottle and kitten reached the matting at the foot of the stairs. The bottle rolled to one side. The kitten trotted to Weatherbee's feet, where it began a plaintive mewing.

"The little thing's thirsty," Ellice Loring explained. "The kittens are used to getting their drink from me. Here's their saucer."

She came along the wire wall to the men, fetching it. Weatherbee had picked up the bottle.

"We don't have to drink any of this," he said to the others; "but if it's water, and not tea or wine, suppose we give a swallow to the cat?"

"You think it's *poisoned?*" asked the girl.

"They wouldn't poison Stone," he argued; "but—to render us helpless, you understand—they might dope our drink. I think they have."

He drew the cork, and poured out a wineglassful of water, which, though warm, looked clear and palatable. Then the three watched the kitten lap the saucer dry.

Almost immediately they found that the test was justified. The kitten, plainly affected by even the small allowance given it, stretched itself out on the matting and fell into a sleep so deep that, though the soft body was taken up and freely handled, the little creature did not awake.

"Dope is the word!" pronounced Houghton grimly.

"I felt it in my bones!" Weatherbee returned. He laid the limp kitten down. "And now let's make them believe their drugging scheme has worked like a charm. Let's arrange things so that when, ten minutes from now, a frightened young lady calls to that brace of hellions to come quick, because Mr. Stone and all the rest of us are dying, they'll find four men lying at intervals along the corridor. They're bound to reconnoiter from the galley end of this hall. The old man will be nearest the door, Noakes next, and you and I, Houghton, will be right here, against the barricade. We'll need to be in the shadow, for we're going to be stuffed."

The scheme delighted Houghton.

"Inspired!" he declared, and half doubled with laughter.

"May we have some more music?" Weatherbee asked.

The girl returned to her piano. The two men went at their task of setting the stage for what promised to be the final scene of the Tai-Lan's strange drama.

Not all of the work was pleasant; but even as they carried the body of the mate to his place in the corridor, and set the chair of the dead millionaire farther along, Houghton went on with that low chuckling and mumbling which, to Weatherbee, was so disquieting.

When the stuffed manikins were put in position where the light was the poorest, Houghton ceased his muttering, and silently stole to a place of concealment behind his own long table.

Meanwhile, the kitten had shown no sign of any suffering. Its breath still came and went regularly and naturally. It was warm. Weatherbee laid it just inside the screening. Beside it he set the saucer.

Ellice Loring was still playing.

"We're all set," Weatherbee told her; "but go right on with the music until I'm hidden. Then you make your terrible discovery. Be as hysterical as you like. You're sure we're all dead."

"When those two men come down, will you kill them?" she asked tremulously.

"Only wound them. They deserve to be shot, but we're going to try to save them for the cutter and the law. Now! You've gone through this last twenty-four hours like a soldier. Hold out for another fifteen minutes, little woman!"

"Count on me!"

A moment, and he was beside Houghton. Then the piano stopped in the middle of a bar, and there went up such a shriek of terror and grief as raised the hair on Weatherbee's scalp.

"He-e-elp! *He-e-elp!*" Without pausing for an answer, she shouted her news. "Mr. Markin! Mr. Mar-r-kin! They're dead! They're all dead! What have you done to them? O-o-o-oh!"

As her cry ended, from the well deck there came a loud laugh. A chair scraped on the plates, and shoes went pounding up a ladder and along the boat deck.

Next, a cheerful whistle sounded. Another replied. Then the three who were waiting heard two excited, happy voices.

"Think we got 'em?"

"I'll bet my hat!"

"Let's go down and see!"

"By thunder, I told you that 'd do the trick!" This was Blodgett, boastful. "Ain't you glad I fetched the stuff along?"

"I'll tell the world!"

Ellice Loring was moaning.

"They're poisoned! They're dying! Oh, come and carry them into the air! You've killed them! You've killed them!"

There was more tramping. It neared. Presently the door at the end of the corridor was opened, but not more than a few inches.

"Crimini!"

It was Markin. Through the narrow chink he had evidently caught sight of Stone's body.

"Come quick!" pleaded the girl. "They don't speak or move! Oh, what was in the water you sent down? They all drank but me. I was playing. Oh, *don't* stand there! Come and help them! Hurry!"

"Aw, shut up your rumpus!" ordered Markin rudely.

She ceased to speak; but still sobbing, and wringing her hands, she entered the door of her cabin and shut it.

Inch by inch the door at the end of the corridor swung in. Cautiously a face appeared—the full, round face of Markin. Then, pressing in beside Markin, came the captain, a pistol in each hand.

"All gone by-by!" he laughed. "Say, this *is* luck!"

"Count 'em!" returned Markin. "One—two—three—and the chief!"

His weapons to the fore, he stepped boldly forward, and Blodgett followed. Hastily they passed the millionaire, bent over in his chair. Close to Noakes, they halted, and the two who were watching them saw both raise their weapons.

One fired into the body of the mate, the other at the two figures lying in a lifelike huddle against the barricade—*bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!*

"Good job!" Markin observed.

Smoke filled the corridor. Through the haze could be seen his smiling countenance as he swung around.

Suddenly other shots boomed in the big room. From behind his ambuscade, yelling like a madman, and firing at every step, ran Houghton. He was not aiming to wound, but to kill. Out of his two weapons, using both hands, he was pumping through the wire screening a blast that carried death.

"Kill!" he screamed. "Kill everybody! Kill!"

Trapped, taken by surprise, Markin and Blodgett drove back toward the piled chairs, ran into each other, and fell sprawling. They tried to reply to the fire as they got to their knees. Then they flattened upon the matting.

Houghton turned, and Weatherbee, as he stood up, saw through the smoke that swirled about him a raving, brain-tortured man who was ready for another victim.

"Everybody dies!" Houghton cried hoarsely. "Everybody!"

He fired; but Weatherbee had bent himself double, and the bullet splintered the panel of a cabin door. Then, as the elder man, running amuck like a maddened Malay, threw himself against the outer side of the table, firing again, Weatherbee went under the board and caught Houghton's feet.

Down went the madman, his weapons flying from his hands. Weatherbee re-versed his own pistol and stunned Houghton with it.

The clockwork!

It was his first thought. The living must be hurried to safety across the bamboo bridge. Taking Houghton by the shoulders, he dragged him through the opening of the wire wall.

He found Ellice Loring beside him.

"Markin's moving," she told him.

He laid Houghton down and ran to examine his fallen enemy.

"Are you badly hurt?" he asked. "I'll carry you out, if I can; but what about that dynamite? Is it safe for a while?"

Markin's eyes were closed, but he was still conscious.

"Weatherbee," he whispered, "there ain't no clockwork—never was. I started the yarn so's the help wouldn't dare turn on me." He tried to lift himself. "Weatherbee, you'll treat the chief white, won't you? He's old and—and cranky. When he wakes up, you tell him for me—"

The message had no ending.

At sunset, obeying Stone's orders of that morning, the skipper of the yacht—a large young man, clean-shaven, coarsely handsome, with bold gray eyes and an independent manner — returned to the Tai-Lan in his spick-and-span gig. Weatherbee was at the rail to receive him; and beside Weatherbee, her eyes well shielded even from the soft light of early evening, stood Ellice Loring.

"Captain," began Weatherbee, as the gig stopped her way against the stern of the longboat, "the man who has been hiring you is dead."

The man in the gig stared up.

"Mr. *Stone?* Why, we heard some shots up the river this morning. Could that mean—"

Briefly Weatherbee explained the happenings of the day. Then he added:

"Captain, this lady is the widow of your late employer."

The skipper lifted a hand to his visored cap, as if acknowledging an introduction.

"Ma'am," he said, "I used to see you often in Manila."

"I suppose," she returned, "that one employer is, to you, very much like another. We have a sick man lying here unconscious, who must be taken at once to the nearest doctor. The dead must have proper burial at sea. I am the owner of this vessel, and of the two anchored down the river. Are you ready and willing to give me your help?"

"Ma'am"—his bold eyes were earnest, his tone was deferential — "I'm here to obey my owner's orders."

Half an hour later, the gig, carrying the three who had been prisoners, pushed its way out of the mangroves. One in that boat looked through her happy tears upon a river she had scarcely hoped to see again, and lifted her face gratefully to a pearl-gray sky through which were glinting the first pale stars.

THE END

THE MARCHES OF INFINITY

Where the last rim of nothing shrinks from sight,
Methought I paused; earth lay so very far
It did not even shine, a tiny star;
The sun itself was lost in utter night;
Our universe, a mere dewdrop of light
Set in the heart of heaven's great sable flower,
Shone intermittent with a feeble power,
So distant stood my path, so weak its might.

Yet, when I thought: "The telescope need pry
No more across the boundless stellar ways,
For here, my soul, the end of things we see!"
Lost in the far depths of another sky
I beheld other banks of suns ablaze
On flickering marches of infinity!

Harry Kemp

Furze Hollow

A STRANGE STORY OF GYPSY MAGIC

By A. M. Burrage

HURLOW came to stay at the Walmley Arms, on the eastern border of Jailbury Common, for two reasons. He needed a country holiday, and by going to Jailbury he was breaking fresh ground; and the inn was within walking distance of Moffat's cottage.

Moffat was a ripe scholar and a recluse, with antiquarian tastes. Hurlow had met him on one of his first visits to London, and had been immediately attracted to the older man. Moffat was a good talker when he chose; and Hurlow, who worshiped intellect, and whose lot in life was cast among uninteresting people, hung upon his words.

The liking was mutual. Possibly Moffat was not adamant against flattery that was obviously sincere. At any rate, he said suddenly to Hurlow:

"If you're ever down my way, I would be glad if you would come and see me."

This, as Hurlow learned afterward, was a rare remark for him to make.

Hurlow himself was a man of forty who worked in a London office, and was one of those reserved, ungregarious beings who find it difficult to make friends. He was a bookworm who read unintelligently. His mind was always full of undigested letterpress. Almost his only recreation, besides reading, was to play chess. He generally spent his annual holiday walking, with a haversack half full of books. This July, however, for the reasons already stated, he settled himself on Jailbury Common.

Moffat disappointed him. He had expected the old scholar to walk miles with him every day, and to show him all the places of antiquarian interest in the neighborhood. Moffat, however, could not be persuaded to stir out of doors, and although it would not be fair to call him morose, Hurlow found it difficult to get him into a talking mood.

He spent most of his evenings at Moffat's cottage, and spent most of his days—the weather, fortunately, was fine — walking, until he knew every path, and nearly every tree and furze bush, on the great tract of common land. He also got to know several of the local peasants, whom he described as "characters."

There was Walters, head keeper on the manor estate, who enjoyed telling him amusing stories about the local worthies. There was old Granny Light, who was supposed to be well over a hundred, and to possess supernatural gifts. She had not walked for years, but during the spell of hot, fine weather she was to be seen in an armchair at her granddaughter's garden gate, white as a bone, shrunken and wrinkled, and seemingly incapable of coherent speech. Her lips moved continually in a meaningless mumble, and it was seldom that even her own kith and kin heard her speak distinctly.

It happened, on a certain moonless night, that Hurlow left Moffat's cottage at about half past eleven, and turned his face toward the Walmley Arms. He was more tired than usual, having exceeded his usual amount of walking exercise during the day. The inn was nearly two miles distant by road, but there was a short cut—a footpath which passed through two copses and over part of the common, through a dip called Furze Hollow. He knew the path by daylight, but, his sight being poor, he had not hitherto cared to trust finding his way in the dark by this shorter route. To-night weariness held out an extra inducement, and he took the footpath.

Hurlow found his way through the two copses without much difficulty, and eventually climbed the stile which brought him out on the open common in the light of the night sky. The night was bright, although moonless, for the stars shone clearly out of a cloudless sky, and it was easy to follow the line of the path as it wound among the bushes. That part of the common was always lonely, although in the early evening one might expect to pass one or two courting couples along the path.

Hurlow had walked only some twenty paces from the edge of the copse when his progress was arrested by a sound from the bottom of the hollow, in front of him. The sound was low, thin, piercing, and almost startlingly sweet.

He came abruptly to a halt. He knew instinctively that these shrill, reedy notes were the music of pipes, and the environment lent magic to the sound. There in the dark, under the steadfast stars, the music shrilled and softened, and shrilled again. In such places and to such notes had Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses danced. It was as if a poem had taken life and become tangible, almost within his grasp.

But this was no lilting dance music. There was no melody, only a succession of notes rising and dying away like so many separate lives, each independent of the others. There was the suggestion of one voice calling to another, as owl calls to owl across the dark.

All in a moment Hurlow forgot the beauty of the sounds, and smelled fear. He smelled it as an animal smells it, the breath cold in his nostrils. He had read about Pan, a dead god who might safely be patronized while poring over a book in a London lodging, but here and at this hour a god not to be scorned.

The half conscious thought was a flash which died on the instant. Pan was dead. Voices had cried his death across the Ægean Sea. This was the twentieth century, and here was he, Hurlow, afraid because somebody chose to pipe at midnight upon a common.

His fear, he had to admit to himself, was incontestable; but then he was a nervous and high-strung man. In the ordinary way he would not have investigated the cause of the music, but the piper was somewhere in the hollow through which he had to pass, and to turn back would have been a concession to the weaker side of himself. Nine men in ten would not have been nervous; Hurlow was, but he strode on all the same. There was good stuff in this high-strung, imaginative bookworm!

He had not taken half a dozen further steps before the piping ceased suddenly, with no warning of finality in the last note. Nor, as he went on, did he know if he were glad or sorry that it was not resumed. Music or no music, he might yet meet the piper.

A minute or two later, when he reached the lip of the hollow, he saw below him, in the middle distance, a flickering red light. He pressed on down the path, and presently made out, in the dimness, the outline of a caravan. He drew a deep breath of relief. It was only a gypsy encampment, after all, and a gypsy piper playing to the stars.

He was not afraid of gypsies. They had a place of their own in romantic literature. He had read the works of George Borrow. He went forward more boldly.

At the bottom of the hollow the drought dried furze bushes grew sparsely, and there was ample room for a camp. Starlight and the glow of the camp fire lit up the scene for him. Two caravans and two tents were there, to leeward of the drifting wreaths of smoke, but none of the campers were astir or in sight.

His nervousness having left him, Hurlow had been prepared to exchange a "good night" with any gypsy he might see. Now, seeing nobody, his fear came upon him again. A furze bush scratched his legs as he hurried forward, lengthening his stride. If he could see nobody, he felt that others could see him—that he was watched by eyes which were neither uninquisitive nor kind.

A feeling of repulsion suddenly beset him, and spurred him up the farther slope of the hollow, away from the camp. Not once did he look back.

Later, when he had reached the edge of the sandy road, and was within a furlong of the inn, he halted to light a pipe. Then he found that his hands trembled so that seven or eight matches flickered out in quick succession.

II

Next morning, after breakfast, Hurlow, lighting his first pipe of the day, stepped out of the inn door into the sunlit road.

The sun was already strong, for he had slept later than usual. Down the road, at the door of one of the cottages that clustered around the inn at this spot where a peninsula of cultivated land ran into the wild, Granny Light was being carried to her chair by her granddaughter and her great-granddaughter. From the other direction came Walters, the head keeper, preceded by a mongrel, which made straight for Hurlow. The dog knew Hurlow for a friend and an occasional source of biscuits. Walters knew Hurlow for a London visitor who was generally willing to lay down the price of a pint of beer. Accordingly, he gave the city man a salute which he normally reserved for the local gentry.

The head keeper stopped to chat, first growling at his dog, which was pawing at Hurlow's coat.

" You're havin' all the fine weather, sir. If you can't say you brought it 'ere, you can say you've kept it 'ere. Down, Rob! Just off out for a walk, sir?"

" Yes, I expect so. Didn't know you had gypsies on the common."

" Oh, they're always somewhere about. It's a job to get rid of 'em, so long as you don't catch 'em doing nothin'. Have you seen some of 'em, sir?"

" Yes—there's a camp down in Furze Hollow."

The keeper's black, bushy eyebrows went up. Then he laughed.

" I reckon you got some of the names a bit mixed up, sir. Furze Hollow is the one place on this common where the gyppos won't go."

Hurlow pointed.

" Don't you call that Furze Hollow over there, with a footpath running through it to White's Copse?"

" Yes — that's Furze Hollow right enough, sir; but you ain't seen no gyppos there."

" Yes, I did. At least, I walked right through their camp."

The keeper's beady eyes twinkled and grew smaller. Wrinkles of laughter appeared at their corners.

" And what time was this, sir?" he asked.

" Close on midnight I should think."

" Ah, now! Come now, sir! You've been talking to Mr. Moffat, you 'ave!"

Hurlow was mystified.

" I was at his house last night," he said. " It was on my way home that I passed the camp."

Walters laughed. It was the smug, triumphant laughter of a man who catches another in the act of hoaxing him.

" Yes, and a nice camp and all you passed, sir!"

" What do you mean?"

" You try them jokes on somebody else, sir," said Walters, still laughing. " I crossed Furze Hollow at eleven o'clock, and there weren't no camp there then. No, sir —you'll have to try me with summat else. Come 'ere, Rob, drat you! Good mornin', sir—good mornin'. See you this evenin', p'r'aps, sir? And don't you let Mr. Moffat put you up to no more jokes, sir!"

He swung on, still laughing, leaving Hurlow mystified. The Londoner stood, staring after the retreating figure with a puzzled smile. Then he walked leisurely in its wake toward the cottages.

A queer business, this, if what Walters said was true! Had the man really crossed Furze Hollow at eleven o'clock on the preceding night? Strange that the camp should have been pitched and fallen to silence, and the fire grown so mellow, in that short time!

And what did the fellow mean about Hurlow's talking to Moffat, and perpetrating a joke? He had never felt less like joking in his life. He had certainly seen the encampment. Besides, there was the piper.

Desultory steps brought him opposite to Granny Light, who sat propped up at her door, mumbling and mouthing as usual, with a patchwork quilt wrapped around her; only this morning there seemed more light and life in her sunken eyes than usual. He addressed her in the tone that one generally uses to beings who can neither answer nor understand:

" Good morning, Mrs. Light. How are you this morning?"

Her fifty-year-old granddaughter answered for her from the open doorway.

" Granny's a bit better, thank you kindly, sir. She've been talkin' plainer, and she actually wanted to get up last night. I b'lieve she was strong enough to 'ave walked if we'd 'a' let her. Wonderful, 'twas! Maybe, though, 'tis only the last flicker of the candle."

Hurlow listened, his gaze on the old woman's face. Her eyes met his, and it seemed to him that she was addressing him. He bent his head to listen, and, for the first time, heard coherent words from her lips.

" I heered 'ee, boy—I heered 'ee! 'Tis the time come at last, and I be ready!"

" What is she sayin', sir?" the granddaughter demanded.

Hurlow did not repeat what he had heard. A shaft of cold had struck him through the sun's heat. He wished them good morning, and set out to walk sharply to Moffat's cottage. For reasons which he did not care to analyze, he did not cross Furze Hollow, but took the longer way by road.

Moffat was neither washed nor fully dressed when he arrived. The recluse performed his toilet by installments, so that it was rarely complete before the late afternoon. He welcomed Hurlow without enthusiasm, but the story which his visitor unfolded awoke both his interest and his activity. He began feverishly to complete his toilet.

"It appears," Hurlow concluded, "that there's some story I don't know. Walters was sure that I had had it from you, and was using it to poke fun at him."

Moffat paused in the act of fastening his collar. His eyes, under bushy gray brows, were alight with excitement, but a suspicious gleam stole into them.

"My friend," he said, "can it be that you got the story from Walters, and are using it to poke fun at me?"

"Of course not! I know no story. Besides, am I that sort of man? For Heaven's sake, tell me what all this mystery is about!"

"I will tell you in good time, friend Hurlow; but first let us visit Furze Hollow. If there was an encampment there last night, either it will still be there, or there will be traces of it. Come!"

They set off together through the copses, Hurlow trying all the way to induce Moffat to talk, and Moffat steadfastly refraining.

On the lip of the hollow, Hurlow halted.

"They've gone!" he exclaimed.

Gone indeed were the caravans and tents that he had seen on the preceding night. The cuplike hollow beneath him was deserted, save for a single figure in white flannels.

"Yes, they've gone," agreed Moffat, gnawing at his beard. "And there's Lutford. Walters has lost no time in telling him."

"Who's Lutford?"

"He's the lord of the manor."

"Do you know him, then?"

"I don't know anybody. I believe we nod to each other. Ah, he's seen us!"

Lutford had indeed seen them, and was making for them up the slope as fast as a pair of long legs could carry him at a walking pace. The decreasing distance revealed him as a young man with an aquiline nose, a narrow forehead, and features alike haughty and rather stupid. He nodded to Moffat when he had reached the pair, and addressed himself to Hurlow.

"Mr. Hurlow, I believe?"

"That's my name."

"Then will you have the goodness to tell me what you meant by informing my head keeper that you saw gypsies here last night?"

"I told him that I saw a camp, and so I did."

"Well, then, where is it? There has been no camp here. See for yourself! In future I should be obliged if you would refrain from fabricating stories likely to disturb my tenantry."

He brushed past them without another word, going the way they had come, and leaving Hurlow too angry and amazed to speak.

Moffat laughed softly in his beard.

"There goes a superstitious man," he said.

"Superstitious?"

"Not to believe, and still to fear; to half believe, and scorn wholly to believe—that is to be superstitious. Now let us see if we can find any vestiges of your camp. From what Lutford said, I do not think we shall."

III

They searched the bottom of the hollow. There were no wheel marks, no trodden grass, no traces of horses, no mark of tent poles—nothing. A chill wind seemed to breathe on Hurlow. His face had turned pale beneath its varnishing of sunburn.

"The camp fire," said Moffat. "You say it was burning on the ground?"

"Yes."

But they searched in vain for a burned patch in the open spaces among the parched, crackling furze. It might have been virgin ground, untouched by man since the beginning of time.

"My God!" cried Hurlow suddenly and hoarsely. "There's something queer about this — something wrong. I don't like it! What does it mean?"

"Sit down," said Moffat, and lowered himself into a bed of dry bracken. "Sit down and don't be afraid, and I'll tell you all I know. It is foolish—superstitious, if you like—to be afraid, for nothing can happen against nature. Hitherto I have kept an open mind about this matter, neither believing nor disbelieving, but admitting frankly to myself that I did not know. Now I am beginning to believe. Calm yourself, Hurlow, and remember that this old world of ours is continually making fresh discoveries and forgetting old ones. We shall never know what the denizens of the lost continent of Atlantis knew. We may never rediscover the lost arts of the Persian Magi, among whom it is almost certain astrology—to name but one—was an exact science. Our sciences would have astonished them; theirs would have equally astonished us. Only stray and broken remains of the secret arts of the ancients survive. The witchcraft practiced in the Middle Ages, and even to-day in certain places, was all a blindfold stumbling after a cult at some time perfectly understood."

He paused. Hurlow, sinking down beside him, said breathlessly:

"I don't understand you at all. What are you driving at? Where are you trying to lead me?"

"I am going to tell you an old story," said Moffat. "It is a well authenticated story, of which your experience may well be the sequel. A hundred years ago, or close upon it, there was an encampment of gypsies in this hollow. Their depredations aroused the ire of the local peasantry, who accused them of witchcraft, as well as of stealing. The squire—a Lutford in those days—at last ordered them to move, and in revenge they are said to have compassed by witchcraft the burning of the manor house. Certain it is that the house was gutted in about two hours one night. The house that you see standing to-day was built upon the ruins of the old one.

"The burning of the manor house brought matters to a head. The villagers, led by the squire, attacked the gypsies and burned out their camp in this hollow. There is supposed to have been bloodshed. One dying gypsy is said to have announced that they would return, and this return was naturally to be regarded as the portent of something ominous happening to the Lutfords. The present-day gypsies know the story, for Furze Hollow bears an evil reputation with them, and none of them would think of camping here.

"There is another chapter of the story. The gypsies, fleeing, left behind them a baby, which was picked up and adopted by a cottage woman who had just lost her own; and that child is Granny Light, who is still living to-day."

Hurlow drew a sudden long breath.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "What are you telling me?"

"Now this is very interesting and curious. Old Granny Light, in her day, was supposed to possess strange and unholy knowledge. She is said to have practiced witchcraft, and the people about here, if you can get them to talk, will tell you of any number of miracles that she is supposed to have accomplished. Also she uttered a prophecy, years ago, to the effect that she would never die until her people came back for her—and you will remember that the dying gypsy had threatened their return. And here she is, still alive, perhaps a little more than a hundred years old, perhaps a little less.

"Well, there you have the story as accurately as I am able to recall it. Now you know why Walters thought that you were joking, and that I had already told you all this; and you know why Lutford, whom the legend threatens with a calamity, was disturbed."

Hurlow stared at him out of eyes which had grown watery with awe.

"Granny Light! The piper seemed to be calling some one. She was restless last night, Moffat—wanted to get up; and this morning she said quite clearly: 'I heered 'ee, boy—I heered 'ee! 'Tis the time come at last, and I be ready!'"

Moffat's long, thin hands were pulling a frond of bracken to shreds.

"Did she say that?" he asked jerkily. "And she wanted to get up, eh? Let's be calm about this, Hurlow—let's be calm, and try to understand. To us may be given an experience unique among living men. Let us try to be worthy of it. Granny Light is a gypsy, and these gypsies are an ancient people who come from the East. They have little to do with the present, and it may be reasonable to assume that shreds of the old learning remain with them. The gift of prophecy, and some of the arts which we ignorantly call witchcraft, may yet abide with them. You and I must be here to-night, Hurlow. There may be much to see!"

Hurlow bunched his handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his brow. When he spoke, his voice was like that of a man in pain.

"You have been talking—words, words, words—I have hardly heard them. For

God's sake tell me, Moffat, what do you really think?"

"What I really think?" Moffat repeated. "Well, then," he added calmly, "I think that Granny Light's people have come back. I think the piper called her, and I think that somehow she will join them. After that, only God knows what is to happen. You will not be afraid to come here again to-night?"

Hurlow left the question unanswered.

"I will come if you do," he said.

Moffat rolled over in the bracken, gazing out over the common, from which a flickering heat vapor ascended.

"It seems so strange to you, and so impossible," he said. "This is daylight, and the year is 1923. In a post office two miles away they are using the telephone and the telegraph. There is a race meeting only ten miles away. Some people would say that the things which we find ourselves believing could not happen in such times as these. We can only admit the incongruity."

He passed a hand over eyes half blinded by the sun, and said in another tone, and with seeming inconsequence:

"There will be another bad fire on this common unless we get some more rain soon, Hurlow!"

IV

Hurlow supped with Moffat that night. They sat talking over the empty grate until nearly half past eleven, when they set forth together.

It was just such a night as the previous one. The moon had risen and set, but the velvet cloak of the firmament was spangled with stars.

All day Hurlow had been in a state of feverish excitement, but his mental ferment had slowly subsided as the time of the adventure drew nearer. This was partly due to the fact that the strangest experiences in life are apt to lose their effect if dwelt upon long enough, and partly due to Moffat's demeanor, which remained soberly constant. Things might interest the bearded, satyrlike little man, but they did not disquiet him. He lent confidence to Hurlow, who would have embarked with him on this adventure sooner than with any young giant armed to the teeth.

Neither spoke much as they breasted the heavy darkness of the copses, but Moffat's step was resolute and even sprightly. He was the insatiable student going forth to learn.

He was already astride the stile separating the second copse from the open common, when he suddenly ceased moving and squatted upright on the top bar in a listening attitude. Hurlow, a pace or two behind him, saw him framed by an arch of the branches, a faunlike silhouette with uplifted finger.

"The pipes!" said Moffat, just above his breath.

Hurlow heard the notes, thrilling and soft in turn, and calling, calling, always calling. The magic of their sweetness scarcely touched him to-night, but he marked its effect upon Moffat, who lingered astride the stile for a long minute.

At last Moffat scrambled over, and Hurlow followed and trod on his heels, desperately anxious to keep pace over the narrow path between the furze bushes. As they hastened, again the piping died away, as suddenly as if the sound were cut off by the closing of a door.

On the edge of the hollow Moffat, who had kept the lead, suddenly stopped.

"There!" he said.

Hurlow looked over his shoulder, and below them, in the cup of the hollow, he saw the ruddy light of a camp fire. After a long moment, since he already knew what to look for, he saw more than that. Starlight and the light of the fire conspired to show him dim shapes, which he recognized as tents and caravans; but down there in that shadow land of furze and bracken there was no movement, no sign of life.

"What shall we do?" he whispered in Moffat's ear.

"You walked through it safely last night," Moffat replied, without moving.

"Yes, but I couldn't to-night. Last night I didn't know."

Moffat turned and faced his companion. Outwardly the old scholar was calm; his only sign of fear was that he sweated like a frightened horse. Hurlow saw moisture like dew upon his forehead.

"Nor could I," said Moffat simply. "I could reason soundly on the folly of fear, but I would not walk through that hollow for all the gold in the Indies!"

Something like panic struck at Hurlow. Moffat's confession of fear withdrew the prop upon which he had leaned. Down there among the motionless shadows lurked invisible things—things that were nameless, shapeless, and malignant, things which could see without being seen. One of the long-lost terrors of childhood returned to him, and like a child he put his hand into Moffat's.

"What are we to do?" he asked in a whisper, hoping that Moffat would suggest a speedy retreat.

"What can we do? It seems that we are only men, and not heroes. We can only stay here and watch."

A moment later Hurlow cried out as if a flame had scorched him. There was a sudden crackling of bracken, and a man's form appeared out of the darkness at his elbow.

"All right, sir! All right!"

It was Walters, the head keeper. His face was ghastly, and by no muscular effort could he control the chattering of his teeth.

"My dog—he run away!" he whispered hoarsely. "He knows! Mr. Moffat, sir, for God's sake what does it mean?"

"I don't know." Moffat's voice was shaken, but it sounded almost nonchalant to the other two. "There seems to be a camp down there."

"Yes, there was one last night, and none this morning. There was none here to-night, half an hour ago. I've been watching all day, and all this evening, and no gypsies on the move, and now—there's fire and caravans and tents! I crawled as near as I dare, but that dog of mine he howled and ran, and dogs know! I've had a scrap or two with poachers, and I've been through the war, but I'd sooner put my head in hell than go down in that hollow!"

Neither Moffat nor Hurlow answered him. All three stood still, listening to the manifold little sounds that broke upon the silence of the night—the wind sighing in the feathery tops of bracken, the distant barking of a fox, the still more distant crowing of an early cock.

"Gentlemen," stammered the keeper, "you'll stand by me?"

"What can we do?" Hurlow growled.

"I got to warn the gov'nor that they're there; and I daren't move no more by myself. Don't stay 'ere, gentlemen! It ain't worth it. Nothin' ain't worth it!"

Moffat glanced at Hurlow.

"Let's go with him," he whispered. "We can return."

Walters knew his way about the common without paths. He knew all the open strips between the furze bushes, and the gaps between clump and clump; so he led them around the edge of the hollow, and out to the road.

His way lay past the inn. Despite the lateness of the hour, the door of it was ajar, and the aperture was faintly illumined by yellow candlelight. A woman, clasping a bottle, stepped back, calling out "good night" to somebody within. It was Mrs. Hicket, the granddaughter of Granny Light. Hurlow stopped and asked:

"What's the matter?"

"It's granny, sir," the woman explained. "We've been having trouble with her again. She've been sayin' as she must get up—her as haven't walked for ten years. I've been holdin' her, and terrible strong she've seemed. She's quiet again now, and sleepin', but I thought it best to get some brandy, in case she went faint after it all."

She hurried on, calling out "good night," and the three men exchanged meaning glances.

"We need not trouble to return to the hollow to-night," said Moffat. "Nothing will happen now!"

V

Next morning the glass fell, and in the afternoon there was a marshaling of clouds in the south and west—whither the wind had veered—which slowly spread itself across the sky. The rumble of far-off thunder, like distant guns, was heard; but the storm circled about without breaking overhead, and no rain fell.

Moffat came over to sup at the inn. Afterward he spent much time at the window of Hurlow's private sitting room, staring out into the night. Hurlow, smoking in an armchair, watched him, and presently inquired after the weather.

"I've seen lightning twice. If it would only rain!"

"Why?"

"I wish there would be a cloud-burst. I should like to see this parched land soaked and sluiced and flooded. I should like to see every ditch brimming and every pond overflowing."

"Because the land needs it?"

"Because young Lutford needs it. My friend, we can have no doubt that unless other powers intervene, there is a tragedy impending for that young man. We have seen and heard enough to assure us that old Mrs. Light's people have come back. They have made good half their threat by returning from the grave, or from hell, or from where you will. The other unuttered half they have yet to make good. We are not, thank God, encompassed by only evil powers, although it would seem that to evil is given a long tether. The last tragedy was by fire. Water is the enemy of fire, and if the rain falls in time this tragedy may yet be averted; but it will be a close race. We must be out earlier to-night."

"Where?" Hurlow asked, puffing nervously at his pipe. "I don't—I don't think—I'll go to the hollow to-night."

"Nonsense!" Moffat said gently. "You have seen so much, and you must see the end. A storm is coming, and the storm will bring the rain. I think the end will be to-night."

Moffat had his way, and the two set out just before eleven o'clock. At the junction of the footpath and the road, they heard the distant sound of pipes.

"Ah!" whispered Moffat. "As I told you! Early to-night!"

To-night the pipes played clearly and sweetly and triumphantly on and on. Some notes broke and chuckled, as if with a lewd glee. The pipes called insistently, and yet played to a measure which tempted hands and feet to respond to its rhythm. Hurlow, scarcely knowing it, found himself marching springily to the beat of the tune.

Then Moffat's hand was on his arm, and Moffat's voice was in his ear:

"For God's sake, not this devil's dance!"

Louder, louder blew the pipes as they advanced toward the hollow. The sight of two figures ahead of them, standing on the edge of the dip, brought them to a sudden halt. Then Moffat, touching Hurlow's elbow, said:

"It's all right—they are Lutford and Walters. I know Lutford's way of leaning on his stick."

The young squire and the keeper heard them approach, and came a little way to meet them. Lutford held out a trembling hand.

"Mr. Hurlow," he said, "I beg your pardon for what I said to you yesterday. The unbelievable is true. It is good of you both to come to-night."

Hurlow muttered something as the four pressed forward once more. Minute by minute the piping grew louder, more alluring, more maddening.

"Has it been like this before?" Lutford asked between his teeth.

"No," muttered Hurlow. "Only a few notes—nothing like to-night."

On the edge of the hollow they could see the camp fire below, but the darkness around it was impenetrable. For a long minute they stood silent, listening to the strange music and the labored sounds of their own breathing. Lutford at last heaved a long sigh.

"I can't stand any more of this!" he whispered. "I'm going down!"

Instantly Moffat had him by the arm, and they made a curious picture for a moment—the little, frail, bearded man clinging to the tall, wiry youth.

"No, you're not!" cried the old scholar. "Not while there are three of us to hold you! Walters! Hurlow!"

They all seized him, and, after a moment, Lutford tacitly surrendered.

"If I were you, Mr. Lutford," said Moffat sternly, "I should be standing by my house to-night!"

"What—at home? With all this happening here?"

"You may be wanted there. Ah!" He uttered a sudden suppressed cry. "Did you see?"

A jagged vein of red lightning shot down from the sky, lighting the hollow for an immeasurable fraction of time.

"I saw caravans and tents," Lutford muttered.

"Nothing else? Listen! The piper is on the move. He is marching to and fro. You can hear. Wait for more lightning, and watch!"

As if in response to a silent request from all of them, there came another flash, revealing to all four pairs of eyes the cup of the hollow.

So much and so little may be seen by a flash of lightning. The eye sees, but, ere the brain can tell it what to look for, the chance is gone. Nevertheless, what Hurlow saw will remain impressed upon his memory until the day of his death. He saw human figures at the bottom of the hollow—perhaps a score of them—and all seemed to be swaying and gyrating to the measure of the pipes.

While he still stared into the dark, Moffat clutched his arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "That other light!"

There was another light now beside that of the camp fire. It grew larger and larger as they stared. A tongue of flame shot up and vanished against the sky. Borne on the wind came the odor of a sweet and pungent smoke.

"The furze!" cried Lutford suddenly. "The furze is alight!"

The fire ran from bush to bush as if it followed a trail of oil. The light from a dozen blazes, which quickly merged into one crackling pool of fire, showed the smoke moving above it like a black cloak. Caravans and tents and people were gone. Only, in the midst of this sudden and growing waste of fire, the pipes played on sweetly, recklessly.

Great gusts of smoke blew into the faces of the four men, but they stood there watching, fascinated, unable to move, until at last Walters uttered a choking cry and pointed.

The fire had lit up all sides of the hollow, and had thrown a wall of bright haze against the darkness around its edges. As they stared, following the direction of the keeper's pointing finger with their gaze, they saw the bent figure of an old woman stumble into the radius of the light, not fifty yards away.

Hurlow uttered a little gasp and shut his eyes. He did not see what the others saw. They told him afterward how the woman's figure, moving swiftly and resolutely, climbed down the slope and flung itself into the bath of fire, which straightway engulfed it; and on the instant the piping ceased.

A blind terror came upon Walters, who uttered a sudden sobbing cry.

"Granny Light!" he shouted, his voice rising to a scream. "Granny Light! Oh, God, it was Granny Light!"

He spun about on his heels and began to run stumblingly. His panic communicated itself to the others, so that they blundered after him. It was not until they had reached the road that Lutford regained control over himself.

"We must wake the village," he cried. "We must save the common if we can. Come on!"

Again they began to run. They were close by the inn when a frightened woman flung herself out of a cottage gateway across their path. It was Mrs. Hicket.

"Granny's dead!" she wailed. "Granny's dead! Oh, what shall I do? Granny's dead! She wanted to get up again, and I was holding her when she died. She was shouting about the piper when the breath left her!"

A cry from the inn distracted them from the woman's half hysterical clamor. An upper window had been thrown open, and the landlord was leaning out and shouting at the top of his voice.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" he cried—the same word over and again.

Lutford took a few hasty steps toward the window.

"Yes," he shouted, "we know! Come down, will you? The common!"

"No, not the common! Oh, look, sir!"

Away to the north they all saw another glare in the sky, and a sudden leap of flames showed them the face of a tall, long, white-fronted house.

As the old manor house had been burned out that night nearly a hundred years before, so was the new one burned to-night—by what agency, who shall say?

MAN'S FIRST TEMPLES

The arching branches meet to build
  An aisle with pillars high
And flowing window tracery, filled
  With stained glass of the sky.

Here mass is said a million times
  Beneath the fir's tall spire,
While thrushes sound the Sanctus chimes,
  And warblers are the choir.

The censers are the balsam cones,
  Whose perfume mounts like mist;
And in the pine tree's solemn tones
  The wind is organist.

Charles Buxton Going

The Tarnished Woman

A STORY OF MODERN LIFE IN THE INTERNATIONAL PLAYGROUND OF THE RIVIERA

By Vance Thompson

Author of "The Man of the Miracle," "Eat and Grow Thin," etc.

XXI

LAMIA was still lying on the *chaise longue*. Since sending Grazia for her opals she had hardly moved.

At first she wondered what kept the girl so long. Then she may have dreamed a little, for she hardly noticed the passing hour. Her thoughts ran idly. They were no more in her command than were her dreams. They came and went as they would—fugitive thoughts that ran forward into the future or turned backward to the passions and terrors of the past.

"If I could forget!" she whispered.

In spite of her will, her thoughts went wandering to the haggard nights of Rome, to the passion that had masqueraded as love, and had pulled her down. No, she could not forget. Memories came back—evil memories. Like unclean things with viscous wings and feet, they prowled in her mind and passed away, only to come again; and she was too weak to defend herself against them.

Then, like far-off music slowly drawing nearer, she would hear a dream whisper promising her happiness. For a little while she would listen to it.

Love! She had seen it coming, and had laughed defiantly. What had love to do with her? She had tried to drive it away. Let it go to the callow girls who were as ignorant as she had once been! But it would not be driven away, standing close, proclaiming:

"I am here!"

As she lay there in her weakness, alone, she tried to picture in her mind the man she loved—Torpichen's face—the blue eyes meeting her own. Feebly she clung to the picture, but always it seemed to be pushed aside.

And the memories came back—memories of a gown she had worn, of a scarf of trailing green and gold; memories insistent, mocking, obscene—that was Kurokin's face; memories of nights loud with laughter, and lit by degraded stars and a leprous moon.

They were memories black and menacing as mountains. They stood up between her and her love

"I cannot forget!" she whispered again.

No—she could not forget.

Why? Why could she not forget?

Men forget. They are wise. Men alone are wise. They know that passion is not love; that it is something to play with and gamble with—like danger and death and fierce elemental things. When they have thrown the dice, they go away and forget the stake and the game.

The passion for killing big game in a jungle, matching life against the thrill of it—the lust for pulling down a woman—they are notable adventures; and for a man they are the same splendid adventure. In his glow of triumph he rides away.

"That's that!" he says lightly.

Then, forgetting the kill, he thinks of manly things — high endeavors, sacrifices, justice, cities to be built, hearth fires to be protected, altars to be erected to pure love. Men are wise. When, in some time and place, love comes to them, they forget their adventures in the jungle and stand up saying:

"Oh, woman, see what pure love has done to me! It has made me clean and new—fit mate for your newness!"

And, because it is true, the woman says:

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"Oh, man, how clean and new you are! Take me!"

Men are wise. They forget the loud laughter and the leprous woman. They wash the old kisses from their mouths, and no taste of poison is left. They are born anew, stainless and loveworthy, when love comes.

Lamia tried to push her thoughts away.

"It's a lie!" she told herself. "It's a lie, a lie! No one can forget. Men cannot forget!"

And yet she knew that men do forget, that the jungle passions leave no mark on them.

Why not women, too? Again and again she put the question, seeking an answer, pitying herself, and pitying women like herself.

Hunger has its rights; for man and woman its rights are equal. But sex hunger? Ah, no! The starved women die, starving, in the garrets and convents and caves of life, for there is one hunger no woman may satisfy and find safety. There are thousands upon thousands of virgins devastated by famine, imprisoned by laws and conventions stronger than steel bars, and starving in their cells.

And the wild women who break out and snatch at adventure—

They pay and pay.

Men only are wise. For themselves they have invented a kindlier law. Nothing in their code proclaims them outcasts from society, blacklegs of their caste, because they have eaten when they were hungry. Not stones are thrown at them, but flowers. They hold their heads up. All is well. Why not? And when inevitable love comes down the highway of life, they run forward to meet it.

"Glory be to God!" the man says. "You are love!"

"Yes, praise be to God!" she replies. "I am love. I am the woman, pure and clean and new, born and preserved for you and for your eyes and your mouth and your compelling hands. Take me!"

And as before the man says:

"I, too, am pure and new and clean, for I have just been born afresh for you."

What he says is the truth, for he has forgotten the loud laughter and the leprous moons and the hungry hours. But can a woman forget?

Lamia was too weary to fight off the oppression of the night, heavy with storm. She was too feeble to thrust back the black thoughts that came out of her past to haunt her—black, defiant thoughts, like night riders, and blacker memories, too, that made themselves far worse than they had been, as beggars ape deformity to make themselves appealing.

She tried to rebel against them. What had she to do with thoughts like these? She had never been one of those women who snatch at adventure. Never—she knew it well. No cry of sex hunger had sent her ravening out into the highroad. She had been going her way alone, full of high purpose, dreaming, and then—

Something had pulled her down. It was something that leaped upon her from the roadside, snarling, and rolled her body in the dust; but what had it to do with her? She was always herself. Cold and white, untouched, unseen, safe hidden within that body, she had waited for love to come and claim her. She had waited within, a virginal soul, hungry—

And love had come.

What else mattered? She would not think of anything else.

Lying there, slender and long, with folded hands and feet, covered here and there with cold-colored silk, she tried to drown herself in her love dream—in the vibration of the man she loved—in Andrew, Andrew—in the light of his eyes, which could see, deep within her, the white soul waiting for him and his compelling word.

This aspiration toward her lover soothed her like some beneficent drug. She seemed to herself to be floating toward him and the shelter of his love.

When the door opened softly, she did not turn her eyes toward him. She knew that he was coming—only he; and a shadowy smile crept round her mouth as she sensed his presence.

"I'm not sleeping," she said.

Torpichen came and stood by the couch where she lay, and bent over her with anxious eyes.

"But you have rested, dear?"

"Yes—I seem to have been resting for hours and hours. Is it very late?"

"No."

She looked up, first at his face, and then she saw the opals in his hands.

"Oh, the poor things! I asked for them—or did I? I remember," she said musingly, "but for a while I forgot. Perhaps I've been dreaming." She shuddered slightly, and moistened her lips with her tongue. "I don't know."

"Will you take them, dear?"

"Put them around my throat. They are sick and lonely."

"That will comfort them," Torpichen replied.

Kneeling beside her, he slipped the opals about her neck and fastened them. She cuddled them against her breast and fondled them.

"You are still bold enough to wear them?" he asked, as he watched her making play with them. "Stones of the shadow! They summon ghosts *et umbram mortis*."

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing." He regretted what he had said. "Only that they are queer things, opals."

"I'm protected," she replied. "See!"

She showed him the bracelet on her wrist. It was the three-quarter circle of a little donkey shoe, worn thin. She wet the tips of her finger and touched the metal—for protection.

"You do it, too, Andrew! One never knows. I do not believe in silly superstitions, but touching metal keeps away evil things and bad luck, no matter what you say."

Torpichen touched the donkey shoe, and, holding her hand, did not release it.

"You've been to your hotel. Nurse told me. You put on another suit. I like this one. Brown suits you, doesn't it?"

There were many questions she wanted to ask him, but they seemed to hide at the back of her mind, as if afraid to come forward.

For a while they were silent. Outside the quiet room the night seemed filled with muttering discontent. The red Judas tree was tossing its bloodstained leaves.

"There is storm in the air," Torpichen said.

He was still kneeling by her side, her hand held fast in his.

"What does it matter?" she asked.

In fact, it did not matter. He had made the remark because he knew they were talking on the surface, and he wanted to go on in that way. He rose, drew a chair close to the couch, and, sitting down, again possessed himself of her hand.

Every time her eyes met his, they questioned him, and he knew she was only sparring for time. She was getting up her courage. She had come out of the cloud of weak unconsciousness into which the shock of the bullet wound had thrown her, and was gradually piecing together the events of that tragic night. He could see her mind fumbling with them, picking them up, almost as if they were visible things; and he was alarmed.

So far as it was possible, they had kept everything from her. The medical men had insisted upon it, and she had not pressed questions upon them during the day, fearing—subconsciously, perhaps—to know the truth. And so she had not learned of Kurokin's sinister end — of the broken and mutilated body that had been hauled out of the ravine; of the search for the murderer, and of the suspicion hanging over Torpichen. She had not even learned of the theft of her jewels.

The drowsy sick room had been a cell of silence, from which all rumors had been shut out. Now at last she was fully awake, conscious of her problems—alive, with the man she loved sitting by her side in this haunted bedroom of the evil villa.

She glanced sidewise at Torpichen's bent head, the strong neck, the smooth hair—and then her hand fell softly.

"I am well enough now," she began slowly, "to go away—from here."

"Soon," he answered. "The Countess Louvorsky wants you to come to her. I promised to tell you."

"I don't mind. She is an old friend. I knew her well in Rome. That must have been long ago. So much has happened!"

Lamia had spoken in short, half careless sentences, but now she drew his head down to hers and looked him in the eyes.

"Andrew, what has happened?"

Her face was drawn. Her eyes were narrow and sad, as if they were looking back into a past for which even love could find no justification, perhaps no pardon. Torpichen read the unspoken thought. As well as if she had told him, he knew what painful memory had risen in her mind, and he answered it in his own way.

"Nothing matters but the present, Lamia—this hour, and you and I, and our love!"

She could not forget so easily.

"Poor Andrew!" she murmured gently. "You love me! Say it! You know you love me!"

"What if I do?"

"Then nothing else matters."

It really seemed to him that there was nothing of real importance in the world but her love for him and his deep, sad love for her. Life, with its tumults and tragedies and indecencies, was only a confused background against which their love stood out high and clear. He wanted her to see it in that way, for he honestly believed that the past had no hold on him.

Always, with narrowing eyes, she studied his face, reading there his love—yes, but discerning other submerged emotions, masculine and atavistic. She told herself that nothing in his past would ever really trouble him. She repeated to herself:

"Yes, men are wise. They forget and are born anew for each new love."

But could she ever forget? That leprous moon would rise again and peer in on them where they lay. In the stillness of the night the dead laughter would waken. They would see and hear, and that would be hell.

She wanted more for him than love. She wanted honor, and a home in his soul. She wanted to live, not only with him, but with his vision and his dream, by day, by night, every moment. She wanted to be always there, before, behind, beside his vision and his dream. She wanted possession as well as love, and she felt herself utterly weak and broken by the past.

He, too, whether he knew it or not, wanted more than love.

"I couldn't make you happy, Andrew."

"Happiness? My God, what does that matter? We've got something better—love. Anyway, the only happiness I want is just what you can give me. That is where I am selfish, dearest. I want your kind of happiness, or unhappiness—whatever you call it—the Lamia kind. We'll share it!"

He stooped and kissed her, and his lips had ways of convincing her that were far more potent than words. She did not cling to him; she hardly moved; only she let herself lie there imprisoned in the enfolding vibrations, masculine, compelling, that streamed from him.

"You'll think I'm weak," she murmured.

"You are well and strong."

"I didn't mean that way," she said, in a little whisper that hardly reached him.

"You are to be quite well again," he repeated, "and strong, as when we tramped the hills together; and we'll be tramps again!"

He held her body close, trying to capture her imagination, and to tear it away from the shadows and memories of that accursed villa. He pictured a world full of sunlight and distance and emptiness, in which they should wander, carrying their happiness with them.

"For I can make you happy, Lamia. Tell me!"

"Dear, you've given me the only happiness I've ever known," she replied, and for herself she added: "And the only real suffering."

"In a few days, in a week, you'll be on your feet—those swift young feet," Torpichen went on. "Then we'll begin our lifelong journey together — lifelong, and on across the frontier—together!"

He told her about it with gentle whispering kisses on face and hair.

"If it could be, Andrew! But I don't know. I am afraid!" She shuddered closer to him, and fear widened her eyes. "Andrew!" she cried suddenly, and did not hear his answer, for at that moment the storm broke.

Hour after hour it had waited, haunting the night. Now, in an instant, all the lawless forces of nature were loosed in the echoing hills. The sea was up; the dogs of the deep howled. Overhead, in a black sky, the metallic clouds smote upon one another. The lightning lunged, and thunderous sound streamed earthward like a torrent.

"Andrew!"

He gripped her and dragged her into his arms, enveloping her terror-stricken body in his strength and in his love.

"A storm, dear. It will pass."

"No, not the storm! It is the answer—"

"Lamia!"

"It is the answer to everything. God is proclaiming it to us. I can't have you, Andrew. Go away! It is the end."

"Steady, Lamia, dearest!"

His voice caught and held her for an instant. Freeing herself a little, she turned and stared with fixed, hallucinate eyes at the window that opened on the balcony. The great silk curtains were swaying and bellying to the storm.

"God!" she exclaimed under her breath; and then she shrieked aloud: "Andrew!"

She tore herself from his arms, staggering to her feet, thrusting out her weak, naked arms toward the window.

The curtains parted. Against the dark

a figure showed, uncertain, motionless. There was a death face, and eyes in it like old fire—a figure out of hell.

Torpichen's leap at it was quicker than his thought. His human hands were on it, gripping the throat. For a second they heaved and grappled there, and in the struggle a revolver fell harmlessly to the floor. The thing he fought with was silent, save for the gasp of breath, but Torpichen swore softly to himself, and hate ran through him—hate fierce and exultant, glorious. It burned in his muscles.

His hate was meeting a hate as fierce as his own. It clung to him, and, although it could not conquer, it would not let him go. Locked together, they reeled out on the balcony into the thunder of the storm.

Joyously, swearing oaths he had never known, Torpichen hurled the thing against the railing of the balcony, which gave way under the drive of his strength. The thing was screaming savagely, and it clung to Torpichen as a wild cat might cling to a wolf. Together, they crashed down into the garden below.

Even as they fell, a flame of lightning lunged, like a sword, for the red Judas tree, and struck and splintered it into a thousand fragments, burying them beneath its ruins. It was as if the spirit of the evil tree had been freed at last, had taken its vengeance, and had gone otherwhere, seeking other betrayals. What was left was the splintered trunk in which it had dwelt, a little heap of twisted branches, a welter of leaves the color of Judas's hair, and half buried forms—motionless.

Abruptly the storm had ceased, as the wind died along the sea, though the black night still rocked to and fro.

The flare of an electric torch showed. Forbess held it, and with him came the *padre,* breathing hard.

"Do you see anything?"

"There—some one!"

It was Torpichen. Even as they touched him, he drew himself up on his elbow. He looked dazed.

"I'm all right," he said. "A bit dizzy—I fell. I'm all right now."

They set him on his feet. His strength came back to him, and his anger.

"Where's—"

"Hush!" whispered the *padre.*

He pushed aside a branch of the shattered tree, and there, in a torrent of blood-red leaves, it lay. It was crumpled and horrible, but it was unbroken. It was something that had once been a man and that still lived feebly. The sword of the lightning, lunging true, had touched the life center, but death came lingeringly.

A groan burst from the dying lips. The priest bent down.

"Bring the torch here," he said. "The man's not dead."

"It's that damned vagabond," Forbess whispered.

Torpichen did not speak. He was staring down at the face—the snarling mouth, the evil eyes. He was looking at the hands, the terrible hands of one about to die. In them it seemed, at these last moments, that all the soul of the man had taken refuge, so that the implacable law of giving up life should be rigorously verified. They were clenched, like the hands of shipwrecked men, or those who fall into a gulf.

"No, not the vagabond," Torpichen exclaimed. "It is Prince Kurokin!"

It was Kurokin. It was the man whom the world thought murdered, and whose body was supposed to lie in the little cemetery by the sea, guarded by sentinel cypresses. It was Kurokin—and on his deformed finger the great diamond blazed in the torchlight.

"Do not try to move him. Stand away!"

The *padre* motioned them back, and kneeled down and took the tossing hands in his. For the wisdom of the church had taught him that the last resort of those who wish to speak to a dying man is to seize his hands. Then the dying eyes open, and the soul pauses for a moment and listens.

"Kurokin!" the old priest said.

The lips moved.

XXII

The Princess Castelmare was receiving her friends in the drawing-room which gave on the formal Italian gardens of her *palazzo,* and Miss Demdyke, in a very becoming new frock, was pouring the tea.

It may be said that Miss Demdyke, her demure dignity heavy upon her, looked prettier, perhaps, than ever before. She was dainty enough to stand on a mantelpiece next to the Sèvres vase, and she won approving looks.

"I was just the same at her age," the princess was saying to Lady Milding.

Evidently time had created a difference.

Sir Humphrey was stirring his tea and

talking to Forbess. The old priest was wearing a new cassock, and nursed on his knees a new hat. His old hat had vanished in his fierce race to the Villa Corinte, that night of the storm, and his old cassock had been torn to ribbons. He laid down his teacup on a table at his elbow, and smiled at the Princess Castelmare.

"I am only too glad to tell you all I know," he said. "I think I know almost everything that has come out, and what has come out — thanks to Mr. Ricci — is the truth."

"And there was the confession, was there not?" interposed the princess.

"Confession? No. There was a statement—a strange, bitter, and, I must admit, particularly venomous statement. I am glad he lived long enough to make it. Otherwise we should still have been in the dark. It was this way," the *padre* went on, and made a little gesture that enforced silence.

He spoke very slowly and clearly, as if he were reading the words from a printed page. He was, indeed, reading them from the page of his infallible memory.

His account of the grim events of the Villa Corinte began in far-off Russia, in the old home of the Kurokins. There were General Kurokin, his wife, and their little boy, Paul; and another boy, the illegitimate child of the general by a peasant woman on the estate. In the frank Russian way, the boy had been brought up indulgently, and without attempted concealment of his paternity. He knew, others knew.

The peasant mother taught her boy one thing—hatred. He grew to manhood filled with hate for the father who had wronged him, and for the half-brother who had taken his place. That was the way Dimitri, the Kurokin born out of wedlock, saw it. He was a victim, and vengeance was his due.

All this he hid away, showing it only to the peasant mother. The Kurokins fancied, in their blind, careless way, that he was full of love and gratitude. They trusted him, taking him into their home, making him a sort of steward and friend. The son of the house held him in affection—in a kind of brotherly love.

It was the revolution that gave the traitor his chance. He brought down on the house wherein he had been nurtured, loved, and trusted, the vengeance of the red wolves of revolt. In that horrible scene of torture of which Lady Milding had first spoken, and which the Countess Louvorsky had related, the Kurokins had perished tragically. Their son, Paul Kurokin, had perished, Dimitri believed, with them; but Dimitri, with what of the Kurokin fortune he had been able to hide away, escaped and got out of Russia.

Once in safety, he was no longer the Bolshevist. He dropped all that, and hid himself in the personality of his half brother. He became Prince Paul Kurokin. At last the wheel of his vengeance had turned, and had given him the place and wealth he had always coveted. He was no longer a peasant woman's love child. He was prince and gentleman, a true Kurokin — of his own creation.

The Countess Louvorsky readily accepted him at his own valuation. Why not? She had not seen Paul since he was a child, and this man, bred in the house of the Kurokins, bore a strong resemblance to his half brother. Both of them, Paul and Dimitri, were stamped with the look of the father.

Not only the Countess Louvorsky accepted the masquerader, but all that exiled world of Russian refugees accepted him. For her and for them he was indeed Prince Paul Kurokin, son of the general and his martyred lady.

He was safe, he was rich, and, above all, he had had his vengeance on the house of Kurokin. He took life royally at Rome, and it was in his strange and evil destiny to pluck a star out of the sky. That was his base triumph over a young girl's weakness and ignorance. It was in his destiny, and it was also in his destiny that Paul Kurokin, the man he claimed to be, should not have perished in that massacre in far-off Russia.

After incredible hardships, which almost wrecked his reason, Prince Paul got out of Russia and reached Paris. There he was one of the unhappy hundreds who sought out the Russian ambassador. The ambassador listened to the refugee's story, but could he believe it, without some more definite evidence? He would make inquiries, he said, and advised patience. It was diplomatic; to Prince Paul, who had heard that some one had taken his name, and had forged his signature at the banks where the Kurokin money lay, it was maddening.

Almost penniless as he was, he set out for Italy, where he heard the impostor was living openly in his name. He made his way south—a vagabond, daily more unkempt and ragged, but determined to run down the man who had usurped his place in the world. For who could it be? Who could successfully impersonate him save that evil son of the house of Kurokin, the traitor and assassin Dimitri?

Prince Paul had been long on the way, plodding along the weary roads of France; and meanwhile the ambassador had kept his word. He had made inquiries through the police of two countries—France and Italy—about this so-called prince who was living so conspicuous a life at San Remo; and Dimitri got word of it.

It was sinister news. The real prince, then, had come to life!

The pretender, remembering that night of torture and massacre when the general and his wife had been done to death, knew that nothing would stay the avenger's hand—nothing but death. He was sure that his half brother would search him out; and therefore Dimitri, driving to and fro in his yellow car, haunted the frontier, watched the approaches to San Remo, and lay in wait for his enemy, determined to kill the man in whose death alone lay his own safety.

He must do it himself. Whom could he trust but himself—his own red hand—to deliver him from the half brother whose place in the world he had taken?

Day and night he watched and waited; but Prince Paul Kurokin escaped him, crossed the frontier in Andrew Torpichen's car, and reached San Remo.

There he found refuge in the old town, and at last—for his destiny had him in hand—persuaded Beppo to hide him. It was the cellar of the chalet in the garden of the Jesuits that Beppo gave him for a hiding place—the half forgotten mule cellar, giving on the street.

Why the gardener's sympathy went out to him it would perhaps be difficult to explain. Beppo, too, was of the wild—a friend of hunted things. He took Prince Paul Kurokin into shelter, as once he had gathered up a starving red cur and made it part of his strange and wayward life.

One night, when he slipped in to bring food, holding up his light, he saw the wretched vagabond tossing there in his sleep—moaning, his face drawn with the torture of some frightful dream of massacre and blood. Stooping, in pity, he touched him lightly on the shoulder. The man leaped to his feet, shrieking out a wild cry that rang through the night. Terrified, Beppo silenced him with soothing words, and then, as soon as he could, hurried away.

This was the cry that Forbess heard. This was the night when he saw Beppo coming from the cellar and limping away through the garden.

With the gardener's aid, Prince Paul found the villa where the impostor lived, and left the dire message—the blood-rusted needles of that Russian crime. Dimitri was not at home. Always he was hunting the man who, he knew, was hunting him. It was not until he learned from the Countess Louvorsky what things were happening at the villa in his absence, that he hastened back to San Remo. Her idle gossip had told him of Torpichen's visits, and fear of his enemy gave way for a moment to barbaric jealousy. He sped back to the villa, only to learn he had more than a rival to face.

When Guido gave him the packet with the fatal needles, he knew that his evil destiny had found him out. It was no longer a fight for a woman he had before him—it was a fight for life and liberty and fortune and all that made life sweet. It was not of his rival, Torpichen, that he was thinking, but of the avenger who had risen, as it were, from the ashes of the dead.

He dressed hastily that evening, eager to see the Countess Louvorsky, and to learn from her what was known of his half brother's reappearance. Had Prince Paul already visited her and told his story? Dimitri must know the truth.

Guido, who valeted him, had laid out two evening suits — one with a dinner coat—that he might make his choice. One suit was left there.

The Countess Louvorsky was not at home. He motored back to the villa, and sent his chauffeur, with the car, around to the garage at the far side of the house. He walked up the long drive toward the front door, and in the shadows came face to face with what might have been himself.

The leap of his heart told him who it was before their eyes met; but Prince Paul Kurokin, facing him there in the garden, was no dirt-clogged, half crazed outcast, as Guido had described the man who left the needles for him. Straight and clean as himself, dressed in evening clothes, as Dimitri himself was dressed, his half brother came toward him — menacing, relentless, with death in his pale, avenging eyes.

"Aye," said the *padre* softly, "death was in the balance, and for a moment none could say whose death would tip the scale."

No word was spoken, or could be spoken, so quick Dimitri was. He fired, and Prince Paul Kurokin fell dead at his feet.

For a moment the murderer thought of calling aloud—of proclaiming that he had shot down a thief who had crept into his house, robbed him, stolen even his garments—the very evening clothes in which he lay dead. Then he reflected. He had heard sinister reports that Prince Paul had already enlisted the aid of the Russian ambassador in Paris. The police might even now be at work.

Quickly he decided. He began to drag the body toward the ravine. It was heavy—heavy as crime. As he was struggling with the dead thing, a little voice, like that of an animal, shrilled in his ear:

"It's too heavy for you, eh? It's like that—the dead cling to the earth when you try to drag them away!"

The assassin whirled around on the witness of his crime. It was Beppo, a dim little figure of a man—perhaps half animal, half man—there in the gloom of the garden. To Beppo life and death were as indifferent as the fall of a leaf.

Beppo swore, the *padre* averred, that when he spoke he did not know which man lay dead there — the vagabond whom he had guided to the villa or the Kurokin on whom vengeance was to be taken. Perhaps he did not care. At any rate, he took the feet of the corpse and the murderer took it up by the hands.

Then a thought came to Dimitri. He bade Beppo wait there by the dead man's body, in the shelter of the bushes. His plan was to go into his room and secure his own passport. In his pocket he had only his card of identification.

His nearest way led through the windows opening upon the salon. What he saw there was Lamia—Miss Borg—and Andrew Torpichen. His barbaric jealousy caught at him. He raised his revolver and fired. The bullet was meant for his rival, but she, throwing herself in front of Andrew, saved him from death. Then Torpichen hurled the bust, and, dazed, half conscious, the murderer reeled out into the garden. It was Beppo who picked him up and helped him away.

It was an evil moment for Dimitri when he got back to his senses. Had he killed Lamia? He thought so. He must escape, and at once.

Where could he hide so securely as in death itself? With part of the bust that Torpichen had thrown, he battered the dead man's features. Then, remembering his own crooked finger—so sure a mark—he hacked off, with Beppo's garden knife, the corresponding finger of the corpse. He thrust his identification card into a pocket of the coat — the dinner jacket — that he was wearing, and exchanged coats with the dead man.

Then, fate smiling on his crime, he discovered his Russian passport where he himself had put it the last time he had worn the dress coat. Both these documents were now thrust into the clothes of the corpse, and then he and Beppo tossed the poor mangled body over the wall down the ravine.

Once more he bade Beppo wait. Dared he enter the house again? He had no choice. While the servants and all within were gathered round Miss Borg, he slipped up to his room and found the ragged clothes discarded by the vagabond. He took them. Then, snatching up what money and valuable papers he could find in a moment, he stuffed them into his dressing bag and crept out of the house.

Beppo, indifferent to the quarrels and crimes of humanity, gave him refuge in the cellar of the chalet, where before he had hidden the vagabond. There he lay and nursed his wounded head, making plans for his ultimate escape.

Beppo brought him news that the body had been found, and that no one even suspected it was not that of the Prince Kurokin whom they had known. Moreover, with grimmer satisfaction, the murderer learned that Andrew Torpichen was suspected of having killed him.

Through Beppo he finally got into touch with Guido. That cynical, purchasable rogue did not need much persuading. When he knew that his late master was really alive, and that the threatening vagabond was dead, he was ready enough to join forces. They would escape together.

Guido knew many hiding places among the ruined cities of the hills, even as he knew the slums of Genoa. He foresaw for himself a life of pleasure and profit, as he wandered the world, blackmailing this money-laden criminal; but he also took thought for himself. Beppo was to come and take his valise, which would be lowered from his window; only what the valise actually contained was not the flunky's clothes, but the loot of his mistress's jewel casket and of the villa.

" And there," said the *padre,* his old eyes twinkling, " Mr. Forbess took a hand."

" And you, too, *padre.*"

" I don't mind being praised for the fact that I kept up with you, Forbess, in that race," the old priest said; " but Beppo escaped us, and we arrived too late to stop Kurokin. He was over the wall while we were struggling up the ravine."

" If Torpichen had not been there—"

" But he was there, or another murder would have been done. That unhappy man's lust for vengeance was greater than his fear of capture, but the hand of God finally pulled him down. God's lightning touched him, and he died—wildly, violently, as he had lived. I fear he was a very bad man," the priest added reflectively; " but we are not here to judge him. Death has stepped in to defend him."

" I don't see why the fellow wasn't unmasked long ago—the flunky posing as the master," Sir Humphrey put in coldly. " The Countess Louvorsky, at least, should have known that he was an impostor."

" It would seem so," agreed the *padre;* " but your valet always has a certain facility in imitating the gentleman—well enough, at any rate, to deceive a woman."

" Men, too, it appears," the princess remarked bluntly.

" Of course — men, too. You would think Torpichen might have suspected, when the fellow let himself be knocked down at Monte Carlo, and never sought satisfaction."

" What he sought was vengeance," Forbess interposed.

" The lackey in his master's coat! It is more than the story of that wretched man. You know that, Sir Humphrey." The *padre* turned toward the old diplomatist. " It is the story of all Russia. He was merely the symbol of millions of Dimitris. It is the old story of the domestic become master—the farce of low life above stairs. The servants have become masters, and the masters have become servants. That, as you know, is the secret of historic evolution in all the ages. *Imperium æquiparat servitutem,*" he added. " Yes, there are millions of lackeys in their lords' coats, and there is no reason why we should have identified this one. Then, too, he was really a Kurokin—baseborn, to be sure, but still at least half Kurokin. It was that part of his blood that fooled us."

No one picked up the *padre's* remark. They had heard him more than once on revolution and democracy and kindred high-sounding topics.

" And the thief?" Sir Humphrey asked. " The butler?"

" Guido? Ah!" replied the *padre,* with a certain air of satisfaction, as if he were speaking of something perfect of its kind. " There is a wily rogue for you! I fancy Mr. Ricci has him in hand. He makes a good defense, I hear. He insists that he was merely being faithful to his master. Even that business of robbing the villa, he insists, was done at his master's bidding. That was his whole trouble—the habitude of being faithful."

And that was really Guido's defense. It was true that he had admitted the vagabond into the villa, but only after being convinced that he was the real prince, and that the other was a scoundrel. His duty, wasn't it? So he let him into the bedroom, gave him a bath and razors, and let him help himself to clothes; and there he left him, going away himself for the comfort to be had in a wine shop.

Of course, later, after the murder, he discovered he had been mistaken, and that his duty bound him, after all, to his original master. Therefore he made ready to go away with him—why not?—and packed up the things of value in the house. They belonged to his master, didn't they? No? Well, that again was an innocent mistake.

He had accused Mr. Torpichen of the murder. Again, why not? Hadn't the American smuggled the vagabond into San Remo, as Beppo had told him? From beginning to end, declared Guido, he had been a victim to his sense of duty—that and nothing more.

"But Mr. Ricci also has a sense of duty," Sir Humphrey remarked. " Has he not, *padre?*"

" Yes, he has; and so Guido is down in the old prison by the Molo," returned the priest, with a grim smile.

" Anybody want some more tea?" Betty asked abruptly.

No one wanted any more tea. She deserted the tea table, and strolled toward the window that was a way out to the garden.

"And that strange little Beppo of yours, *padre*—have they caught him?" Lady Milding inquired.

"One does not catch a hill man; but he has been seen," the priest answered. "Old Lucrezia, his aunt, knows where he is, I dare say. At all events, he is not invisible, since he no longer has that frightful relic of superstition, the severed finger of a murdered man. It was strange that he left it in his lair, but perhaps it was not ready for the incantation."

"They believe such things?" asked the princess.

"And a thousand others, up yonder in the stone cities of the hills."

"It seems to me that is another reason for locking the fellow up," declared Sir Humphrey.

"No, no!" urged Lady Milding gently. "Surely he is not altogether responsible?"

"He is not, Lady Milding," returned the priest; "and he should not be blamed too much. He is one of the hill people, a descendant of the old fire-worshiping Ligurians. Is he quite human? I hope so. I trust he has understanding enough to be saved withal, and you know we have to believe that his soul, when properly cleansed, will be acceptable to his Creator. He was prowling in the old hill cities like a wild animal when I found him—or, at least, when his aunt brought him to me. He has always borne watching, I am sorry to say—eh, Forbess?"

But Forbess was not in the room. Betty, too, was not in the room.

"They are in the garden," murmured Mrs. Demdyke placidly.

"Of course they are," the princess replied. "Thank Heaven, Betty has come to her senses!"

"I am sure it will be quite suitable," Lady Milding said sweetly, "from all points of view."

"They were made for each other," the princess proclaimed, in her best manner. "I always said so. Indeed, I knew it from the first day I saw that dear young man!"

The *padre* smiled and chuckled. He did not seem very much surprised.

XXIII

Why she clung to the Villa Corinte Lamia did not know. Torpichen had urged her to leave it, and the *padre* had advised her to do so, but she would not go. The very horror that brooded over the place seemed to give her courage to do the thing she had determined to do. Her physical strength had come back to her, and, with it, a moral energy that had been quiescent, drugged by the facile emotions of her drifting way of life.

"I have found myself at last," she said confidently.

She tried to think that she was like the girl she had once been, proud and independent, and ready to face the consequences of her acts.

"Things did not happen to me. No—I pulled them down on my own head. I am to blame for it all."

In the long hours of day and night she saw this "all" for which she was to blame—men murdered and killed, men lying in prison for theft or hunted over the hills, and one man—God forgive her that sin—cursed with the doom of love for her.

In the chaos of her life Andrew Torpichen's love for her stood up dark and enormous in its tragedy; for she knew how well he loved her. There was no use lying to herself about that—he loved her. With all the power of her love-starved soul she had sought his love and gained it. Why should she lie to herself? He was her man, and she was his woman. An ineluctable decree, old as time, had set them apart from other souls, and nothing could change it. They had hunted each other down, each of them hunting across half the world; and they wanted each other with overwhelming desire.

She and he—and yet, with a resolution that held, though it wavered, she had been able, through the days and nights, to keep him away.

It was easier to hold to her resolve here in the crime-soaked villa. The muttering ghosts aided her. It was her fortress against him—against her lover, against herself, against her love, against her happiness. The very hideousness of the memories that clung to the walls and dripped from the tapestries gave her strength to do what she had determined to do.

There was no use in bidding him to go away. He was chained to her by a love as strong as her own. She must place herself beyond his reach.

"When we are married, Lamia," he had said, taking for granted, in his dominant way, the consent she had never given.

She had looked at him with eyes that were suddenly blind and could not see his face, and her heart shook, but she had not answered him. She had no answer ready; but now she knew what she must say to him—no, and no, and no!

At last she had found herself, and something she called duty bade her answer no. What she called duty was an immense passion for sacrifice. Only by sacrificing herself could she pay for what she had done. It seemed to her that she absolutely must pay in suffering—alone.

This feeling grew stronger and stronger within her. It was the instinctive desire, which lies deep within the woman soul, that justice shall be done. It was entirely just and right that she should suffer. Her very love for Andrew Torpichen—love at once fierce and pitiful — sustained her in her fixed determination.

She would not lay upon him the burden of her past.

She sat with closed eyes, thinking; and her past streamed by her with its leprous moonlight and little cries and laughter.

Could she forget? And, if she forgot, could he ever forget? Over and over again she asked herself these questions.

Oh, their love was pure, it was white and masterful as light! But what would happen to it in the years, when these old memories woke and leaped and yelped at them—these horrible memories?

For his soul's sake, she told herself, she could not consent. She saw herself going down through the self-sacrificial years, bent and lonely, but victoriously atoning — for his sake.

She was fighting this battle alone. She had shut her door against her lover. Alone in the house of evil memories she fought her battle.

She was afraid to see him. She feared him and his weapons. They had the strength of carnal things. He would come to her in the arrogance of health and courage and passion, with love shining in his eyes, with his conquering hands held out to her, and he would take her. He meant to have her, in spite of everything, in spite of herself.

And her weapon against him? What had she but her poor, tortured, loving woman's soul, so weak in its yearning, so strong in its purpose? She had that, and her love for him, for she loved him better than she loved herself. Her first and last thought had always been for him—the only man who had ever possessed her heart and filled her life.

But what could she give him? Wifehood? She who had committed the sin unpardonable—for a woman?

Her hatred for the dead man rose up anew. She remembered the night of poisonous moonlight, the passion-drugged wine, his laughter as he pulled her down and set his mark upon her. What followed was sheer recklessness and bravado—the devil rising in her and proclaiming defiance to the world.

For Kurokin there was only hate—hate growing colder and deadlier. She hated him for the passion he had wakened in her body when she was no longer in command of it. She felt burned and scarred and defiled with that unconsenting passion, and her hate for him penetrated her dreams and her flesh.

More than all, she hated him when he asked her to marry him, offering to cover the *amour* with the cloak of his princely name. His princely name! A lie, like all the rest of him—lackey, thief, murderer, impostor—and as base as was his cruel and savage love for her captured body. She had refused this bribe to respectability with scorn so keen that it had severed their relations, leaving her to lurk there in the villa, or to flaunt her reckless despair in the casino or on the promenade, while Kurokin went his criminal way.

And then Andrew Torpichen came.

Yes, she must pay the price. He must not pay, for in her wild, unhappy mood of sacrifice she thought that the price he would have to pay for her would be his own social and moral ruin. All that was good in her, all that was chaste in her, clamored for self-sacrifice.

She was lying on the couch in the green and gold salon of the villa—where love had first whispered to her—where she had wept—where violence had filled the night.

Stretched out long and tense and white, she summoned her soul to aid her in her fight against herself and her love and her desire.

She heard the doorbell ring. He would be there, as every day; and, as every day, Grazia would send him away with a stolid refusal. He would not force his way in, she knew. He would not cozen the doorkeeper. His pride would hold him back, even as love for him held her back.

The door opened. She heard footsteps in the hall, and Grazia's voice on a high note. She started up, a panic of fear and uncontrollable hope knocking at her heart.

The *padre* came in. He crossed the room with his military stride, and stood looking down on her. His face was kindly, his old eyes quizzical. His huge, flat hat encumbered his hands. He looked about for a place to deposit it, and then, with a gesture of impatience, tossed it to the floor.

"May I take this chair?"

He drew it toward the couch.

Half sitting, half crouching among the pillows, Lamia watched him. What had this old man to do with her dead, and with her battle?

"There's an east wind to-day," the priest began casually, "for the first time this year; but the *levante* is a good wind—he is the violent herald of spring."

"Why did you come to see—me?"

He bent toward her with a gentleness that none save women and children had ever seen in him.

"Because you need me," he said quietly. "You have not sent for me—no; but I have come to help you in your hour of need. You, too, are of this flock," he added in an undertone.

More than the kindliness of his face, it was his voice that moved her, with its strange blending of power and tenderness—the compelling voice that belonged to her childhood. There had been another priest who spoke to her like that, long ago, in a far land among tall trees. In spite of herself, she responded to it.

"Yes, father," she whispered.

She closed her eyes, and a fragment of her past came back, exact and clear. She was a little girl again, in the convent. Trees were about it, and walls. She was lying in a little white bed. There were two rows of little white beds, foot to foot; and in each bed a little girl lay. Somewhere a bell rang. Day was just breaking in that northern world; and a sister passed from bed to bed, touching each sleepy forehead with a finger dipped in holy water, and saying softly:

"*Vive Jésus!*"

One by one the sleepy voices answered:

"*Vive Marie!*"

The convent, and the paths in the walled garden, and the color and the silence of the flowers!

"Father," she said at last, "now I know why you have come to-day. Mary sent you to help me. You must take me away to safety—to a refuge from life. I have been thinking."

"Tell me what you have been thinking."

"I will tell you everything."

With the prompt and unreasoning power of decision which characterizes the woman—and the saint—she knew that she could say everything to this grave and gentle doctor of souls, just as one speaks to a physician, revealing the defects and shames and sores of the physical body.

And she told him—even the things she had hardly confessed to herself. It was her life story, flowing by under his kindly eyes. She spoke in a low voice, rapt, confessional. She lingered over her childhood. That, at least, was beautiful and without vulgarity. Then the death of those who loved her had made a sudden emptiness about her. She was alone, listening for a voice.

What she heard, as other girls hear it, was the call of the ghoul. It tore the emptiness like trumpets. She would be the woman who did things—not as other women did them, half-heartedly. She would give herself to art—the great art for which men burn up their lives. She went to Paris, for the call she heard was voiced by that ghoul of souls, and she answered the irresistible summons.

She flung herself into the squalor and the gayety of the Latin Quarter. The taste of it was foul in her mouth, and in sudden revolt against it she fled across the Seine to the other Paris. She found herself in a madder world—a world of dukes and dancers, bounders from South American republics, yellow diplomatists from all the orients, rogues and royalties, old names and new money, Parisians, Russians, Americans, Greeks famous for their vices or their virtues, jockeys and journalists—the driftwood of midnight Paris.

And there Kurokin found her—a prince! Prince and exile and martyr, haloed with romance—that was the way she saw the savage adventurer who had raised himself on a pinnacle of theft and murder and treachery; but she did not let herself go. She was strong enough to seek safety in flight. Rome would shield her; she would hide in the shadow of St. Peter and his saints and prelates.

Kurokin followed. With his false name and forged papers, he dared not risk facing a marriage ceremony, even if he ever thought of it. It was easier to pull the wild girl down. The leprous moonlight and the passion-poisoned wine of Rome were his confederates. She woke to find him watching with cynical eyes the horror of her young soul struggling back into its dishonored dwelling place. He was smoking a cigarette.

"The evil that others do to us is not our evil," the *padre* was saying.

Where his ecclesiastical mind saw her sinfulness was in the fierce recklessness with which she had thrown her life away, defiantly accepting her rôle of victim and harlot.

"What does it matter, father, now that the evil, as you call it, is done? I want to put a barrier between myself and the world —between myself and every one. Do you not understand?"

"Yes, I understand—every one—that is, the man you love."

"Yes, the man who loves me. He wants to marry me. That would be"—she hesitated over the word—"purgatory for him."

"And for you?"

"For me, too, perhaps, if that's of any importance."

"You have thought it all out?"

"Everything."

She was sitting up on the couch now, her head erect, her eyes fixed on his. Her soul seemed to look out on him, hopelessly, like the face of a prisoner in the depths of a cell.

"And you can help me, father."

"I came to help you."

"I want to go back to a convent—where I came from—and hide myself, and suffer and pay. The strictest religious order—"

She was thinking of herself robed in sackcloth, barefooted, pacing cold, dim corridors. The vision brought her a kind of dolorous comfort.

Perhaps the old priest, having studied the souls of women who love and suffer, captured her fleeting thought. He smiled gently, and for a moment he did not speak. Then he said:

"And you think you are called to a life of prayer and service? It is the very highest vocation, some of us think; but true vocations are born with us. They do not come — they are. Have you thought of that?"

"I am thinking."

"No—not of that. What you are thinking of, and what you have thought of, is one thing—the man you love. That is the love you would take with you into a convent—to live with it, to dream of it, to weep over it, to exult in it and in your suffering and abnegation."

"Oh," she cried, "I want to hide!"

She covered her eyes with her hands and cowered.

"Vocation?" The *padre's* voice rose. "No — what is urging you is pride — and cowardice—and fear—and vanity!"

"No, no! I'm not thinking of myself!"

"Pride and cowardice," the priest went on emphatically. "Fear that some one may look askance at you and wound your self-love—vanity—but, above all, the cowardly desire to run away from the consequences of your own deeds."

"Tell me the rest," she said. She was roused, and faced him with steady eyes. "Am I so weak as that? Don't you see that I can't give myself to him? If I didn't love him, it wouldn't matter"—she paused—"or not so much. Father, I only want to save him!"

"Are you not making a lot out of a little?"

"A little—that?"

"You must not think I undervalue the virtue of chastity here on earth, where it reaches up symbolically to heaven; but there are other virtues. You cannot save yourself or the man you love by picking out one of the virtues and crucifying yourself for it."

"But I thought—"

"No, you don't think—you love; and the greatest of these is love."

"What shall I do? What shall I do?"

There was a look of fervor in her eyes, yearning for sacrifice, hunger for love.

The old, wise man looked at her gravely. For a long while his eyes were bent on her tormented face. Years of meditation, years of experience in studying the fierce, fluttering souls of women who burn and weep and suffer, had given him a kind of clairvoyance that saw all things. He seemed to be looking into the innermost being of this one woman, seeing there her passions, her memories, her frailties, her illusions, and, high above them, the compelling love that was the rock and refuge of her troubled life.

Nothing else mattered, for this woman was love — created for steadfast love as suns were created for steadfast light. A spot on the sun? A tarnished shadow on the mirror? Still the mirror garners the unstained light; the sun is ever more the home of life-giving force.

Suddenly the *padre* smiled. It was his old half quizzical smile, infinitely wise, patient, and kindly.

"I believe I can tell you what you are going to do—irrevocably. Am I right?"

"What?" she whispered.

He leaned forward and took her hands in his big grasp.

"You are going to marry the man you love!"

XXIV

It was in the old church of San Siro, of which Torpichen had once disapproved, that he and Lamia were married. Spring had come that way, and the day was full of warm sunlight.

Marwick waited in the car outside. Apparently he was absorbed in contemplating the caper bush, with its crooked branches, and its pink and white flowers now just coming into bloom. He was wondering, as so many others had wondered, how it had ever got there, just above the portal of the old church, and what it was.

The peasants would have explained that a miraculous wind had blown the seed hither. The *padre* would perhaps have told him that it was a symbol proclaiming that life is a little thing, and that, even as the flower of the caper withers, so man goes to the house of his eternity—*in domum œternitatis;* but the old priest was not there to enlighten Marwick on the subject of the vine, so he continued to stare at it with uncomprehending eyes.

Within the dim church the *padre* was saying the age-old words that were to link together in mysterious union two souls, wandering in space and time.

In a little while, as Marwick waited, Lamia and Torpichen came out of the church. The streaming sunlight met them as they came. Behind them, in the shadow of the portal, loomed the tall, dark figure of the priest. His face was grave but kindly. He held out both his hands to them.

"I shall say good-by here," he said; "but my prayers shall go with you."

"Good-by, *padre!*"

"Good-by!" Lamia's eyes were clouded with tears, but not tears of unhappiness, as she whispered the word and raised the old priest's hand to her lips. "Good-by!"

The *padre* went back into the church. Torpichen helped his wife into the motor car.

"You know where to go, Marwick. Drive slowly."

"I quite understand, sir."

Marwick understood, but he did not quite approve. Indeed, the wedding was not at all what he thought it should have been. It was the sort of thing foreigners would do.

In the first place, it was the wrong kind of a church. Then there had been no wedding guests—not to speak of a best man, and bridesmaids, and nice little pages in pink silk breeches and laced coats. Moreover, to his mind, the bridal couple, gray-clad for travel, lacked distinction.

They went along the sea-girt road toward Ospedaletti. For a while they were silent. Lamia's eyes were on the olive groves that rose terrace upon terrace, while Torpichen looked seaward, where the sunlight blazed a path to far-off Corsica.

At last he turned and took her hand—naked save for the sacramental ring that he had just slipped on one finger. She turned to him with her wonderful smile—her real smile, without artifice, infinitely gentle and intimate.

"I was saying good-by to the hills," she said; "to the hills and the trees."

"And I was greeting the sea, which is to bear us away to other lands, and other hills and trees—the ones that are really our own."

"Yes," she answered musingly. "I wonder, Andrew—"

"Yes?"

"I wonder what I shall find there. It is so long ago, and my childhood seems so far away!"

"Up in those woods you've told me about—your woods in the north—we shall find the little girl you were."

"Perhaps!"

"Anyway, we shall look for her—though I like this Lamia best."

Marwick had halted the car at the side of the road. Between old walls, a stony path, worn by the tiny hoofs of generations of little donkeys, wound up into the hills.

"Do you remember?" Torpichen asked.

She glanced curiously about, and then a flush came to her face.

"I remember," she said. "Of course we must go."

He helped her to alight, and slowly they went up the steep and broken path. Halfway, where the wall curved in, was a wretched-looking wayside shrine—a mere post with a poor, warped picture of the Madonna in a wire-screened niche. A votive offering of a few wild flowers lay withering in front of the unlighted lamp. Underneath some ribald hand had scrawled in red chalk:

"Viva Lenine!"

"They might have waited," Torpichen observed gravely. "In a few years the pale face would have faded away and the poor shrine fallen into dust. There is so little of it left!"

"But what has the Madonna to do with this angry scream of sordid politics?" Lamia exclaimed.

"I suppose that, in a practical way," Torpichen suggested, "the dreary little helot who wrote that was logical enough. Communism is not an economic problem—in its very essence it is a negation of God. If it doesn't mean that, it means nothing. The Bolshevists are logical when they destroy the ancient symbols. An old peasant woman brought me a crucifix the other day. It was a wonderful bit of ivory—very yellow, and carved in the long ago. I can't describe the mystic sense of those anatomical lines—you must see it yourself. The old woman sold it because nightly, when her son came from the wine shop, he cursed the poor figure and spat upon it. She, you must remember, was not quite sure that God was dead; but her son knew. He had been personally informed of the nonexistence of God. A fellow who had come all the way from Moscow told him so one night, so he really knew. Of course, he still crosses himself when he meets a black cat, and when an owl hoots three times. He crooks his fingers to ward off the evil eye, and studies his dream book before playing a number in the lottery; but he's got rid of the Great Superstition, and I have come in for the wonderful old crucifix. I shall give it to you, dear. It is very beautiful—a carved prayer."

"The poor, poor thing!" Lamia lamented, full of sympathy.

Kneeling before the saddened and outraged Virgin, she threw away the withered leaves rotting in the can, and replaced them with the flowers she carried in her hand. Then, slowly, arm in arm, as on the first day when they had been brought together—out of space and infinite time to journey on and on together—they turned out of the little mule path into the hills.

They came to the olive tree beneath which they had sat on that initial day. Nothing was changed, except their two lives. The lizards had not changed; one of them darted along the gray wall and paused to worship his god.

"It's our little lizard," she exclaimed. "I'm sure it is the very same one. You said he was a sun worshiper. Look! Is that the way he prays?"

The lizards had not changed. The olive tree whispered its old quivering message, as if mourning over its own deformity. Only they had changed. For them, life had turned on its axis.

Something of that kind crossed Torpichen's mind, as he sat beside her there on the warm hillside.

"Do you remember the man in the Arabian tale?" he asked inconsequently. "Do you remember the one-eyed man in rags and dirt? There were three of them, I think; and when they were questioned, they answered mysteriously, 'We are three calenders, sons of kings;' and I think the mob jeered at them and laughed. What I mean is that I was like them—you, too, dear one—do you mind if I say it? We were half blind beggars, like the three ragged fellows. We didn't know, or we had forgotten, that we were, as they were, children of kings. We didn't know that the rags and the wayfaring and the begging for broken meats were only temporary, and that some day we should come home from exile. Dear one, until you taught me, I did not know; but oh, king's daughter, you made me remember that I, too, am the son of a king and should no longer be a wanderer, wasting life away on dirty highways. To live high and clean, for the king's daughter—"

She had listened quietly, though for an instant there was a fleeting look of pain in her eyes. When she spoke, it was merely to echo his words:

"Home from exile—yes, that is it!"

"Both of us, Lamia," he said.

"Yes!"

And again they were silent, hand in hand, while the little sun lizard darted to and fro on the wall, watching them, or raising his tiny head to stare full at the sun—at the splendor of his god.

At last Torpichen rose, and, stooping, lifted her to her feet, as he had done on that other vanished day, when they had not yet remembered their kingly lineage. For a moment they stood looking seaward.

Then, suddenly, she exclaimed:

" Andrew, look!"

Against the horizon a white yacht showed, over it a faint pennon of smoke flying.

" Aye—that's Forbess and the Demdykes—all of them," he said.

" And they are sailing away into the future, and into happiness, I am sure," she returned.

Torpichen glanced sidewise at his wife. She was still looking out across the sunlit sea, where the white boat was a mere glint of silver.

" I hope so," he replied.

" Andrew, I knew about — Betty," she said, without looking at him. " The *padre* told me."

" Yes? I am glad of that."

" And the *padre* brought me a message from Betty."

" Yes?"

" It doesn't matter what it was," she went on. Turning, she lifted up a radiant face. " It doesn't matter what she wanted me to do—for I've done it!"

He took her in his arms and held her very close.

" Say it," he pleaded.

" Husband!" she whispered, and their lips met.

THE END

PAUL VERLAINE

Before his Statue in the Luxembourg Gardens

The sky is just above the trees,
  So blue, so calm,
As in those lines you wrote yourself,
  Half song and psalm.

The peaceful murmur of the town,
  The plaintive bird,
Still follow you to this abode
  Where Paris heard.

They gave you paths where children pass
  In joyous bands,
And lovers fill their silences
  With clasping hands;

And lilacs scented in Japan
  For strange delights,
And guardians to lock the gates
  Upon your nights.

Does wonder give you this, or pain—
  This furrowed brow?
What have they done, the ones who pass,
  With their youth now?

Do you regret each subtle song
  The murmurs brought,
And every vague turmoil of verse
  The poets wrought?

Your gaze is solemn on the earth,
  As if you knew
The sky is just above the trees,
  So calm, so blue.

Charles Divine

100 Years to a Day

HOW wonderful it would be if our bodies were like the "one-hoss shay"—if we kept on going until we just collapsed from old age! What joy to live a life free from pain and illness, filled with pleasant activities and followed by a *natural* passing away—just the simple stopping of a worn-out heart!

Heart *disease* is another matter. Today more people die from heart disease than from tuberculosis or cancer or pneumonia. And many of them die needlessly.

Heart disease is not the tragically incurable and unpreventable affliction it was thought to be.

Many damaged hearts can be made to do their work through proper rest and care. The heart has amazing recuperative powers and often will mend itself if given a chance. But even though you have some serious organic heart trouble do not lose hope. A noted heart specialist said: "The cases in which people drop dead from heart disease are comparatively few."

"Have you heard of the wonderful
one-hoss shay,
That was built in such a logical way
It ran a hundred years to a day,
And then, * * * * *

* * * *

* * It went to pieces all at once,—
All at once, and nothing first,—
Just as bubbles do when they burst!"

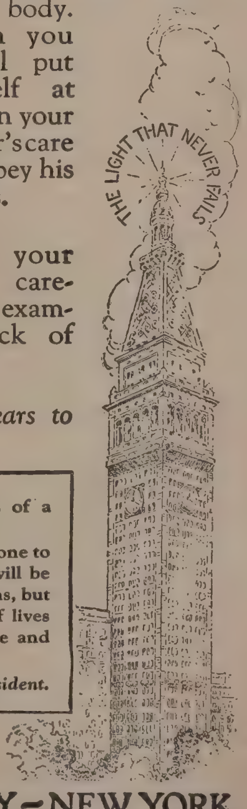
We are grateful to Mrs. Howard Pyle and Houghton Mifflin Company for permission to reprint Howard Pyle's historic picture of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes' wonderful "One-Hoss Shay."

Find out how to live so you will not over-tax your heart. Learn the kind of occupations that are safe for you. Let your doctor tell you what you may do and what you must not do.

A lot of people are suffering from imaginary heart disease. There is scarcely a sensation associated with heart disease which may not be caused by some other disorder. The most important thing is to keep yourself strong and well, so that disease germs will have little chance to attack your body. When you are ill put yourself at once in your doctor's care and obey his orders.

Have your heart carefully examined after every attack of serious illness.

Aim for "*A hundred years to a day.*"


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

It has been estimated that 2% of the population of the United States, or more than 2,000,000, have organic heart disease. The annual death toll is 150,000.

Prior to 1912 tuberculosis caused more deaths in the United States than any other disease. Since then, heart disease leads.

In the communities where people have learned how to fight tuberculosis, it becomes less of a menace each year.

As fast as people understand what can be done to prevent and relieve heart disease, there will be not only a decrease in the number of deaths, but also a splendid increase in the number of lives completely transformed—from dependence and anxiety to usefulness and happiness.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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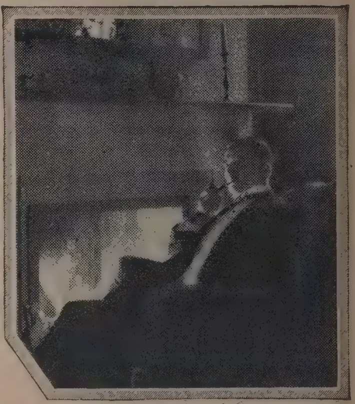
THERE is nothing mysterious about the action of Fleischmann's Yeast. It is not a "cure-all"—not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion and assimilation, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health* is yours once more.



ABOVE

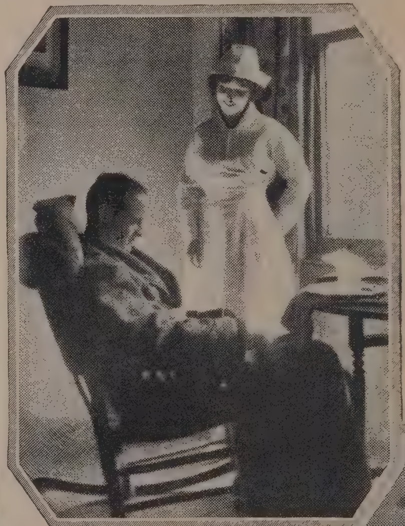
"UP to a couple of years ago I never have had regular intestinal action. I worked on this defect in many ways—abdominal exercises, vegetarianism, occasional medicine, Dr. Coué . . . Fleischmann's Yeast has been the only agent that, with me, ever produced normal movement continuously. And as a natural consequence, I now feel finer in other ways—enjoy everything more: food, work, play. Even my pipe seems to smoke better!"

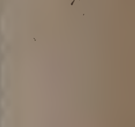
(*A letter from Mr. Henry J. Carroll of St. Louis*)

AT RIGHT

"I AM a graduate nurse. Back in 1911 while in charge of an operating room, I was afflicted with boils. I tried many remedies—still boils came, and I got run down and unable to carry on. Finally a physician told me to take Yeast. . . . That was twelve years ago, and I have never had a boil since. I have used Fleischmann's for hundreds of patients and for any number of different ailments. I am glad to say that twelve years have not dimmed my enthusiasm for Fleischmann's Yeast or staled my appreciation of what it has done for me and for others in the course of my professional life."

(*Miss Ann Batchelder of New York*)





AT RIGHT

"RUN-DOWN and ill from overwork, I had local neuritis, stomach acidity and insomnia; a formidable array of enemies for the brave little yeast cake to tackle! Yet in two weeks friends began to take notice. . . . In a month my complexion was clear and lovely, stomach in perfect condition, nerves 'unjangled,' gone the 'All worn out' feeling, and I was able to sleep like a top."

(*Extract from letter of a Chicago business girl, Miss Dorothy Deene*)

ABOVE

"IRREGULAR hours, eating in snatches, desperate hurry . . . nervous, little or no appetite, slept poorly, and worst of all suffered from constipation. Then I tried Fleischmann's Yeast. Almost at once 'evacuation was easier, no stomach pains, no heartburn.' Today—'practically complete elimination of bowel trouble, clearer skin, sounder sleep, *better health*.'"

(*Extract from letter of a New York reporter, Mr. A. Kandel*)

EAT 2 OR 3 CAKES A DAY REGULARLY

—before or between meals—plain, dissolved in water or milk or spread on crackers or bread. A cake dissolved in a glass of warm water before breakfast and at bedtime is especially beneficial in overcoming or preventing constipation. Fleischmann's Yeast comes in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today. And write us for further information or our free booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-1, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

"THE AIR IS FULL OF THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T MISS"

When Radio called, Eveready was ready

TWENTY-ONE years ago, when wireless telegraphy had its first birthday, National Carbon Company's dry cell batteries were nine years old. Even then, its batteries were world famous as convenient, economical and efficient sources of electric energy.

With the introduction of popular broadcasting, radio leaped into universal service. Radio engineers used Eveready Batteries as their standard in designing tubes and receiving sets. Eveready engineers, backed by the most complete research and testing laboratories known to the industry, worked with them to discover how the known dry cell could be improved for radio work.

The fruit of these efforts is the Eveready family of radio batteries conspicuous for vitality and endurance—the right battery by test and proof for every radio use.

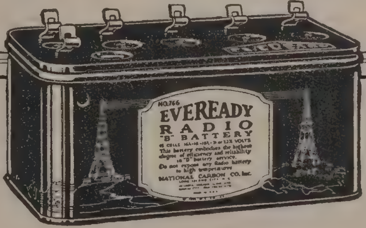
Insist on Eveready Batteries—they last longer.

Informative and money-saving booklets on Radio Batteries sent free on request.

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, Inc.
New York, N. Y.

Headquarters for Radio Battery Information

If you have any battery problem, write to Radio Division, National Carbon Company, Inc.
208 Orton Street, Long Island City, N. Y.



Eveready "B", 22½ volts, No 766 with Six Fahnestock Spring Clip Connectors

Radio has moved from the laboratory and amateur's work-table out into the refined surroundings of the family living room. In keeping with this new companionship we offer this reliable, long-lived Eveready "B" Battery, in an attractive, new metal case, worthy to stand beside the rich cabinets of fine radio sets.

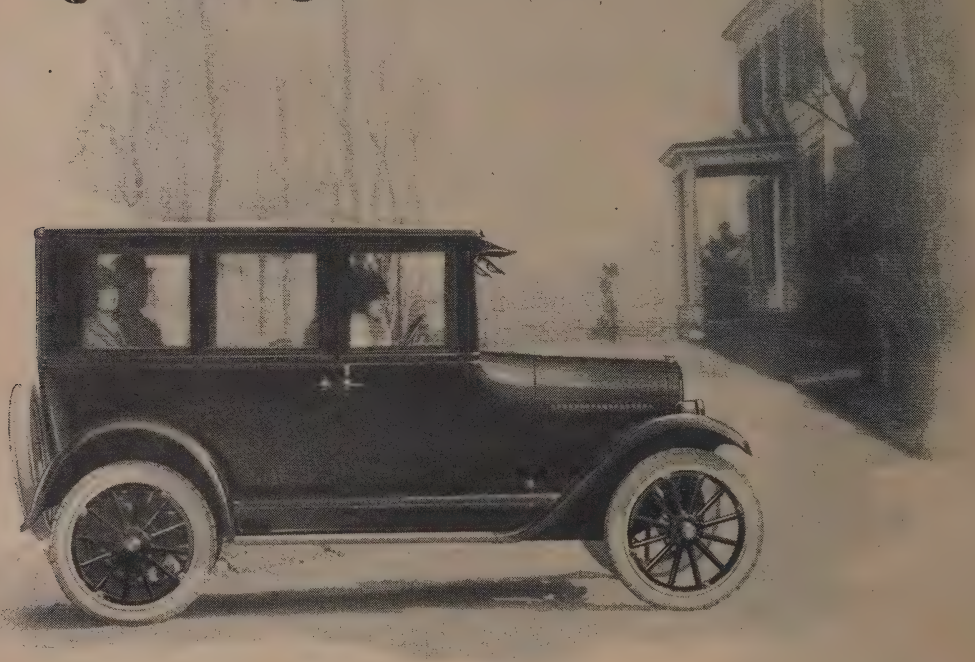
EVEREADY
Radio Batteries

—they last longer

for Economical Transportation

CHEVROLET

Quality Cars at Quantity Prices



Chevrolet now leads all high-grade cars in number sold.

Our new low prices have been made possible through doubling our productive capacity.

We are now operating twelve mammoth manufacturing and assembly plants throughout the United States in which thousands of skilled workmen are turning out two thousand five hundred Chevrolets per day.

Notwithstanding our recent big reduction in prices the quality and equipment of our cars have been steadily increased.

Today Chevrolet is beyond comparison the best dollar value of any car sold at any price, due to its low average operating and maintenance cost.

Chevrolet Motor Company, Detroit, Mich.

Division of General Motors Corporation

Chevrolet Dealers and Service Stations everywhere. Applications will be considered from high-grade dealers only, for territory not adequately covered.

Prices f. o. b. Flint, Michigan

SUPERIOR Roadster	$490
SUPERIOR Touring	495
SUPERIOR Utility Coupe	640
SUPERIOR Sedan	795

Commercial Cars	
SUPERIOR Commercial Chassis	$395
SUPERIOR Light Delivery	495
Utility Express Truck Chassis	550

No. 2674 *Eveready Focusing Spotlight with the 300-foot range*

EVEREADY UNIT CELLS fit and improve all makes of flashlights. They come in two sizes to fit every tubular case flashlight. Know the Eveready size that fits your case. Then you can buy new Eveready Unit Cells without taking your flashlight along. Eveready Unit Cells mean brighter flashlights and longer battery life.

Don't grope - - -

use your flashlight!

FOR that dark cellar stairway, where a misstep may mean a fall—keep a flashlight handy. Don't fumble in clothes closets—hang an Eveready by a tape on the closet door and have instant, safe, bright light whenever you need it. Don't stumble—keep an Eveready by the back door for outdoor trips. Keep another on your bedside table to see that baby is covered, to find your slippers, to look at your watch.

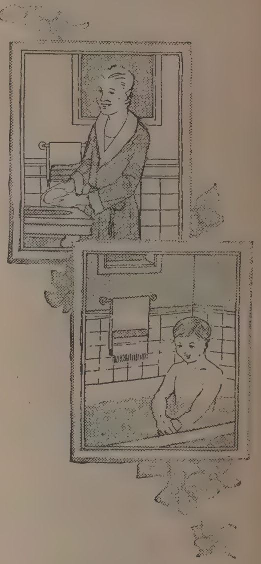
To get the best light and most light from any flashlight, keep it loaded with Eveready Unit Cells; long-lived cartridges of brilliant light. All electrical and hardware dealers, drug, sporting goods and general stores, garages and auto accessory shops sell them.

When you buy new flashlights, be sure they have EVEREADY stamped on the end. EVEREADY means the highest standard of flashlight quality, and Eveready Unit Cells give more light longer. Prices from 65c to $4.50 complete with battery—anywhere in the U. S. A.

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
New York San Francisco
Canadian National Carbon Co., Limited
Factory and Offices: Toronto, Ontario

EVEREADY
FLASHLIGHTS
& BATTERIES
–they last longer

End the day the Fairy way!



TAKE the Fairy way to dreamland! Before retiring wash or bathe with Fairy Soap and experience the glow of perfect white cleanliness.

Smooth and mild. Nothing in Fairy Soap to irritate the most sensitive, tender skin. It cleanses and soothes and helps you hold that youthful freshness.

Millions of people use Fairy Soap daily for toilet and bath. To young and old it is bringing new skin health—a new appreciation of a pure white soap.

The handy, convenient oval cake helps, too! Fits the hand and wears down to a thin wafer without breaking.

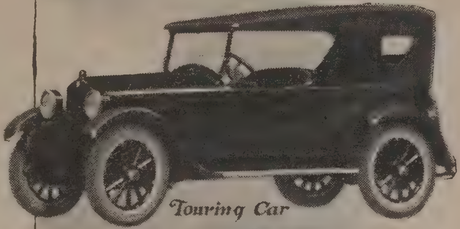
It's white! It's pure! It floats!

FAIRY SOAP

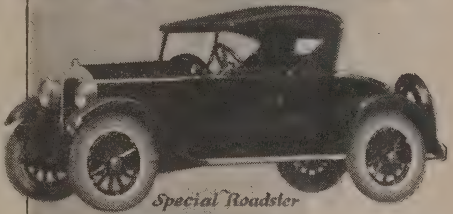
ONE chassis, one standard of quality, with a type of body to meet every personal transportation need.

One quality—and that the high Hupmobile standard—because Hupmobile manufactures its product complete in its own extensive factories, and exercises the most rigid control over the raw materials which come from outside sources.

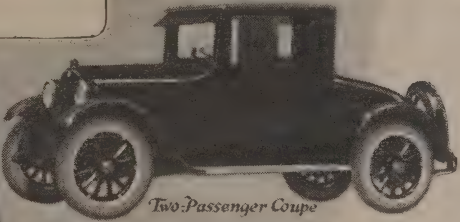
The beauty and value that are built on sound design; and a design that works first and last for the comfort and safety of the passengers, and the lasting satisfaction of the owner.



Touring Car



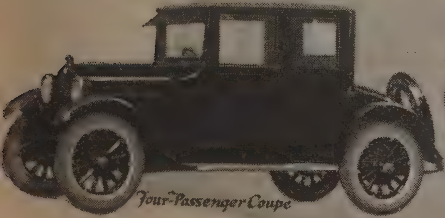
Special Roadster



Two-Passenger Coupe

Sedan

Club Sedan



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Big JOBS Open

Would you like to be a star salesman? Men who have mastered salesmanship—who are really proficient—name their own salaries. $5,000 to $10,000 a year and better not uncommon. Big money and opportunities in business always open to men who can SELL. Success in selling field leads to highest executive positions. Demand enormous. Old theory about "born salesman" exploded. Any man of average intelligence can now learn to sell thru scientific coaching. Training, the secret. Write today for free book, "MODERN SALESMANSHIP." It tells how you can quickly get into the selling game and win your way to the big-pay jobs. Learn in spare hours at home principles and methods of ablest sales organizations in America. Successful salesmen report sales doubled and trebled thru scientific study of salesmanship under LaSalle Problem Method. Low tuition fee—easy terms. Write now for information.

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- ☐ Banking and Finance
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- ☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
- ☐ Personnel and Employment Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
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- ☐ Commercial Spanish
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching

Name..

Present Position..

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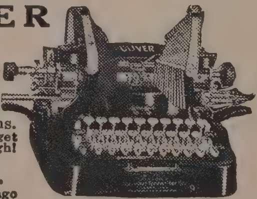
TYPEWRITER BARGAINS!



A real writing machine, standard keyboard, all improvements, rebuilt like new in Oliver's own factory, for a *fraction* of what you'd expect to pay! Easy terms.

Send now for new offer. Act quick, and get yours from 1,000 machines just put through! Address—Rebuilt Machine Dept. 11.

Oliver Typewriter Co.

159 Oliver Typewriter Bldg. :: Chicago

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You can quickly qualify to accept a sales position paying from $85 to $200 weekly with big, successful Corporations. I will train you quickly, in spare time, by my entirely different and proven successful method, the "Ward Actual Experience Method." *Not* a "college" or "book" course, the *real thing* direct from the "firing line."

I Pledge You Success

You get my personal directions. I let you in on "selling knacks" that enabled me to organize and train my own powerful sales organization. I also direct and guide you by weekly letters just as I do my own active road men, you simply can't fail to make good. Get my *free* book full of "Inside Facts" and latest Selling Science, it's FREE.

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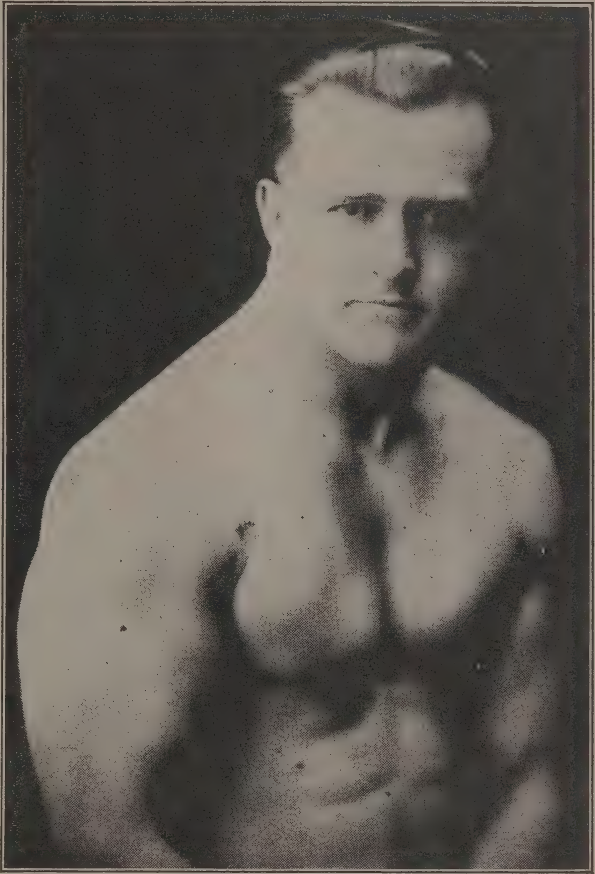
Are You Ready for the Ash-Can?



EARLE E. LIEDERMAN,
America's Leading Director of Physical Education

DO YOU realize what it means to neglect your body? Do you know that you will clog up with waste matter and deaden your life just as ashes do in a furnace? Are you going to drag yourself through a life of misery and be ready for the undertaker when you should really be only starting to enjoy life? Come on and brace up. Take a good hold of yourself and shake those cobwebs out of your brain. Give me a chance at that weak backbone of yours and let me put a pair of man-sized arms into those narrow shoulders.

Pills Never Made Muscles

I am not a medical doctor. I don't claim to cure disease. Neither do I put any self-assumed title of Professor before my name. *I am a builder of muscle*—internal as well as external. I claim and can prove that by proper exercise you can even build muscle in and around your heart and every vital organ. The kind that shoots a thrill through your veins and reaches every crevice of your body. I add years to your life, and oh boy! what a kick you get out of every day you live. And talk about big, brawny arms and legs, or broad backs and husky chests—just take a look through this winter's copies of Physical Culture Magazine and see for yourself. You will see a few pictures of my pupils there—living examples of the Earle Liederman system — doctors, lawyers, business men, but every last one of them good enough to pose as a professional strong man. Some are in better shape than men who are now acting as instructors to others.

Pep Up

What are you going to do about it? Don't sit idle and wish for strength. That will never bring it. Come on and get busy. You must have it, and I'm going to give it to you. I don't promise it, I guarantee it. You don't take any chance with me, so come on and make me prove it.

Send for My New 64-Page Book

"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send to-day—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 5002, 309 Broadway, New York City

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN,
Dept. 5002, 309 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—I enclose herewith 10 cents, for which you are to send me, without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." (Please write or print plainly.)

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Aspirin

Beware of Imitations!

BAYER

Demand

Unless you see the "Bayer Cross" on package or on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer Aspirin proved safe by millions and prescribed by physicians over twenty-three years for

Colds	Headache
Toothache	Lumbago
Neuritis	Rheumatism
Neuralgia	Pain, Pain

Accept "Bayer Tablets of Aspirin" only. Each unbroken package contains proven directions. Handy boxes of twelve tablets cost few cents. Druggists also sell bottles of 24 and 100. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticacidester of Salicylicacid.

She Found A Pleasant Way To Reduce Her Fat

She did not have to go to the trouble of diet or exercise. She found a better way, which aids the digestive organs to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

She used *Marmola Prescription Tablets* which are made from the famous Marmola prescription. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They will allow you to eat many kinds of food without the necessity of dieting or exercising.

Thousands have found that the *Marmola Prescription Tablets* give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

MARMOLA COMPANY
283 Garfield Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

Relief *for* Coughs

Use PISO'S—this prescription quickly relieves children and adults. A pleasant syrup. No opiates.

35¢ and 60¢ sizes sold everywhere

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Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made self-adhesive purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone.** Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

Grand Prix.

Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**
Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY.**

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Name..

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Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao..................

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BE COMFORTABLE— Wear the Brooks Appliance, the modern scientific invention which gives rupture sufferers immediate relief. It has no obnoxious springs or pads. Automatic Air Cushions bind and draw together the broken parts. No salves or plasters. Durable. Cheap. Sent on trial to prove its worth. Beware of imitations. Look for trade-mark bearing portrait and signature of C. E. Brooks which appears on every Appliance. None other genuine. Full information and booklet sent free in plain, sealed envelope.

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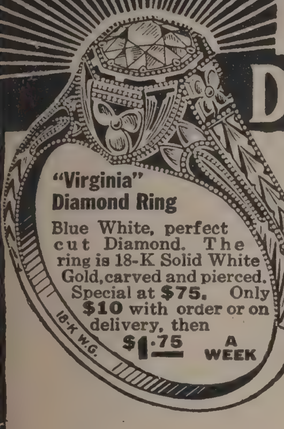


"Virginia" Diamond Ring

Blue White, perfect cut Diamond. The ring is 18-K Solid White Gold, carved and pierced. Special at **$75.** Only **$10** with order or on delivery, then **$1.75** A WEEK

Rectangular Wrist Watch Ribbon Bracelet

18-K White Gold, 17 Jewels, $29.75. 14-k White Gold, 15 Jewels, $24.85. Yours for $3 down, then $1 a week.

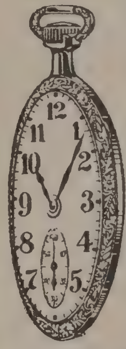
Loftis Carved "Perfection" Diamond Ring

Blue White, perfect cut Diamond, set in White Gold prongs. Ring is 14-k Solid Green Gold. Bridal Blossom design.

$50

TERMS: $5.00 with order or on delivery, then $1.25 a week until $50 is paid.

Also any price to $2,500.



17 Jewel ELGIN

No. 15—Green Gold, engraved, assorted patterns, guaranteed 25 years, 12 Size, gilt dial - **$32**

Terms: $3.25 Down then $1.00 a Week until paid.

"Sylvia" Diamond Ring

Blue White, radiant, perfect cut Diamond. The ring is 18-K solid White Gold, carved and pierced. Special at **$100.** Only **$7.50** down, then **$2.50** A WEEK

Also bargains at **$100** to **$600**

Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry

SEND FOR CATALOG

Our new Catalog is your shopping guide to unusual bargains. Over 2,000 illustrations of Diamond-set Jewelry, Watches, Wrist Watches, Pearls, Mesh Bags, Silverware, etc. There is something appropriate for everyone. Select as many articles as you wish and have all charged in one account. Sent prepaid for your Free Examination.

Catalog Explains Everything

We Import Diamonds

direct from Europe and sell direct by mail — a great saving to you.

Satisfaction Guaranteed or Money Refunded

Our Diamonds are distinctive in beauty, blue white, perfect cut, of great brilliancy, set in the latest engraved and pierced Solid White, Green or Natural Gold mountings; also Platinum.

Special Values

Diamond Rings - - -	$25.00
Diamond Bar Pins - -	25.00
Diamond Scarf Pins -	15.00
Diamond-Set Onyx Rings	15.00
Men's Watches - - -	15.00
Pearl Necklaces - - -	10.00
Mesh Bags, fine mesh -	15.00
Wedding Rings - - -	5.00
Diamond Cuff Links -	25.00

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Stores in Leading Cities

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AUDEL'S CARPENTERS AND BUILDERS GUIDES

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Up-to-date information in handy form. Easy to learn carpentry. Save money doing your own building. Make money doing carpentry work. Audel's Guides give complete instruction on how to:—Use Tools and Steel Square, Make Joints, Draw and Read Plans, Estimate, Frame Roofs and Houses, Lay out Work, Build Stairs, Do Saw Mill Work, Practical Painting —with thousands of Short Cuts.

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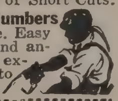
Pocket size. Flexible covers. Gilt Edge. Easy to read and understand. Questions and answers teach quickly. Coupon gives free examination. No money now. Nothing to postman. Pay only if you are satisfied.



FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 72 5th Ave., N.Y. City.
Send me for *free examination* AUDEL'S CARPENTERS AND BUILDERS GUIDES, 4 numbers. If satisfactory I will send you $1 within 5 days and $1 monthly until $6 is paid.

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Address..
Occupation..
Reference.......................... ALL-F. M.

Bright EYES Are An Asset

Clear, sparkling EYES are an aid to success, both in business and society. Keep your EYES constantly bright and alert through the daily use of *Murine.* This harmless lotion instantly imparts new life to dull, heavy EYES.

Write Murine Company, Dept. 61, Chicago, for FREE Eye Care Book

MURINE FOR YOUR EYES

OUT EVERY THURSDAY **THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY** TEN CENTS ALL NEWS-STANDS

Painful chest congestions

The moment you feel that painful tightening that betokens a chest cold—go for the bottle of Sloan's. Apply gently: you don't have to rub it in.

Immediately you feel a gentle glowing warmth. The contraction relaxes—the congestion breaks up—the pain ceases—soon the cold is gone. Get a bottle from your druggist today—35 cents.

It will not stain.

Sloan's Liniment *kills pain!*

THE VALUE OF CHARCOAL

Few People Know How Useful it is in Preserving Health and Beauty

Nearly everybody knows that charcoal is the safest and most efficient disinfectant and purifier in nature, but few realize its value when properly prepared and taken into the human system for the same cleansing purpose.

Charcoal is a remedy that the more you take of it the better; it is not a drug at all, but simply absorbs the gases and impurities always present in the stomach and intestines and carries them out of the system.

Charcoal sweetens the breath after smoking, and after eating onions and other odorous vegetables.

Charcoal effectually clears and improves the complexion, it whitens the teeth and further acts as a natural and eminently safe cathartic.

It absorbs the injurious gases which collect in the stomach and bowels; it disinfects the mouth and throat from the poison of catarrh.

All druggists sell charcoal in one form or another, but probably the best charcoal and the most for the money is in Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges; they are composed of the finest quality Willow charcoal powdered to extreme fineness, then compressed in tablet form or rather in the form of large, pleasant tasting lozenges, the charcoal being sweetened to be smooth and palatable.

The daily use of these lozenges will soon tell in a much improved condition of the general health, better complexion, sweeter breath and purer blood, and the beauty of it is that no possible harm can result from their continued use, but on the contrary, great benefit.

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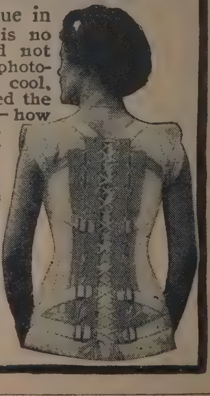

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ashamed

It brought him untold misery; yet only he, himself, was to blame.

HE had neglected his teeth so long that he was actually ashamed to visit his dentist. And like so many people, he kept putting it off.

Finally he became so sensitive about their appearance that in conversation he habitually distorted his mouth in an effort to hide them from view.

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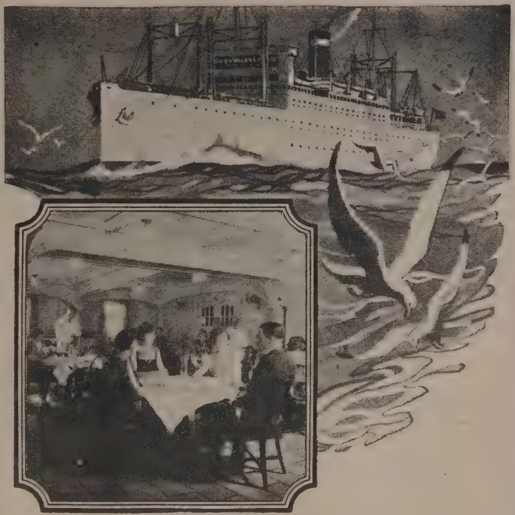

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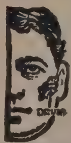

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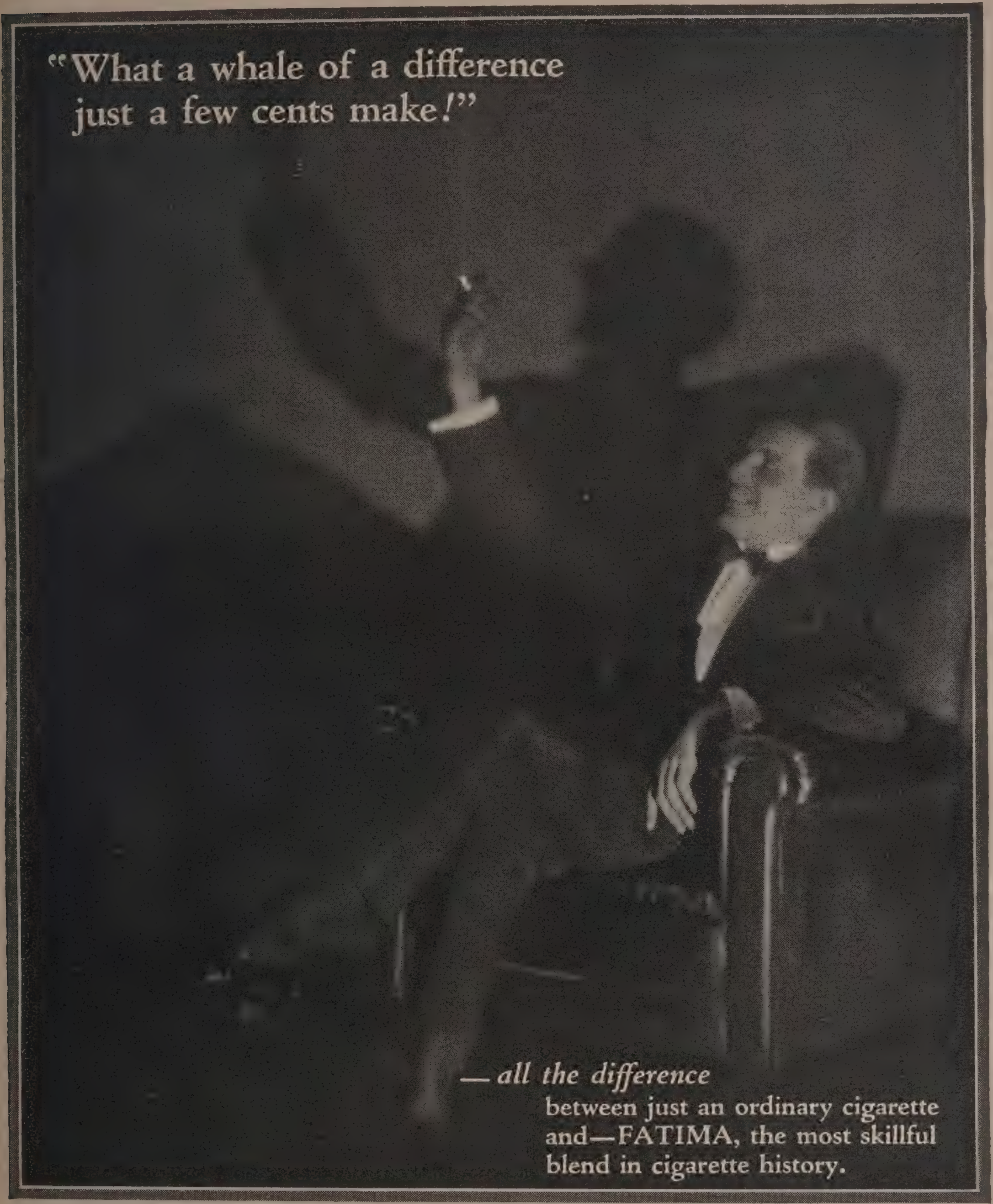

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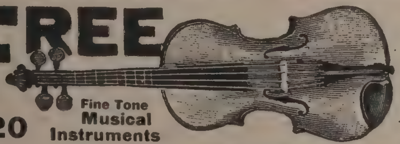

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3. **"MESQUITE JENKINS INVESTIGATES"** —Hopalong goes trailing in an emergency.

January 5
4. **"THE TENDERFOOT"** —Why Hopalong and Red decide to get drunk.

January 12
5. **"THE PARSON"** —What followed in the wake of a broken wheel.

January 19
6. **"OGALLALA GIVES WELCOME"** —In which is set forth an encounter with a mean deputy marshal.

January 26
7. **"WORTHY OF THE MASTER"** —A shooting match sets the town agog.

February 2
8. **"CROSSING BRIDGES"** —A matter of dry weapons on a dry occasion.

February 9
9. **"VESTED RIGHTS"** —Mesquite Jenkins flashes a six-gun, and turns a triangle into a square deal.

February 16
10. **"HOME SWEET HOME"** —Hopalong deduces Red's complaint and blocks a relapse.

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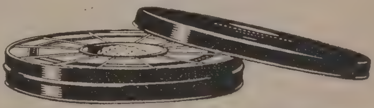

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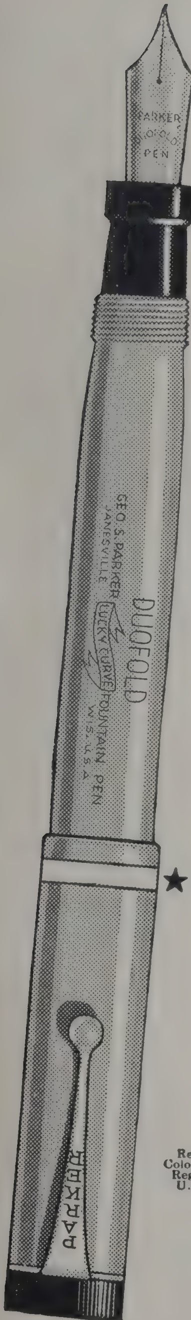

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MUNSEY

Suspicion

by

Reita Lambert

The Story of a
False Accusation

MARCH

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To keep the hands smooth and attractive all day. To relieve catchy fingers, apply while at work.

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That is why we wear leather soles and heels. *Leather is a second skin to our feet.* Through the natural pores of the animal's hide our feet actually *breathe.* Your doctor will tell you that this "breathing" of the feet is one reason why there is nothing like leather for health. He will tell you that a leather sole "gives" with every movement of your foot, yet it is so sturdy that it supports the arch.

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Leather is tough, strong and long wearing. Look at a piece of leather through a microscope and you will see that it is composed of thousands of tiny fibres—elastic, strong and resilient. Leather soles and heels will keep shoes style fresh. Then, too, leather soles and heels are *safe.* They will not slide on wet sidewalks.

Ask for the all-leather shoe

Ask to see the all-leather shoe. It has all the style, the comfort, the economy of long wear and lasting good looks you are after. Insist upon shoes that let your feet breathe.

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Nothing takes the place of
LEATHER

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CONTENTS FOR
VOL. LXXXI MARCH 1924 NUMBER 2

Serial Stories

SUSPICION (Chapters I-VII) . . . . Reita Lambert 213
THE TWISTED FOOT (Chapters X-XVI) . . William Patterson White 270
THE TOKEN (Chapters XIII-XVIII) . . . . Louis Tracy 326
THE BULLFIGHTER (Chapters XIX-XXIV) . . . . T. S. Stribling 367

Short Stories and Novelette

Spending the Evening (Novelette) . . . . John D. Swain 193
Wanted—A Palace . . . . Oma Almona Davies 236
The Rules of the Game . . . . L. M. Hussey 245
A New England Night . . . . Margaret Busbee Shipp 253
The Synagogue . . . . Myron Brinig 259
Shadow Hands . . . . Genevieve Neergaard 293
Belated Rewards . . . . Charles Belmont Davis 301
The Necessary Spark . . . . Oney Fred Sweet 307
Drums in the Dark . . . . Alexander Hull 317
The Wind of Luck . . . . William H. Hamby 343
A Desperate Doll . . . . Gladys Hall 353
The Way Women Are . . . . Edwin Palmer 360

Poems

To a Disconsolate Beauty . . Richard Leigh 235
Roads . . . . Charles Divine 244
Heart's Desire . . . . . . Clinton Scollard 258
The Wanderer . . . . . . Neeta Marquis 269
Rain on the Mountain Peak . William H. Hayne 306
Let Me Be Your Boswell! . . . Olin Lyman 342
Chains of Thought . Richard Butler Glaenzer 352
Lessons . . . . Ruth Forbes Eliot 359
A Thought of Summer . . Oliver C. Moore 384

THE APRIL MUNSEY (on sale Thursday, March 20) will contain two interesting features—"Riders of the Hidden Trail," a short novel of Western adventure, by Charles Wesley Sanders, printed complete, and the opening chapters of "Poison Ivy," a realistic novel of small town life, by Louis Lacy Stevenson, a young American writer for whom we predict a future of real distinction

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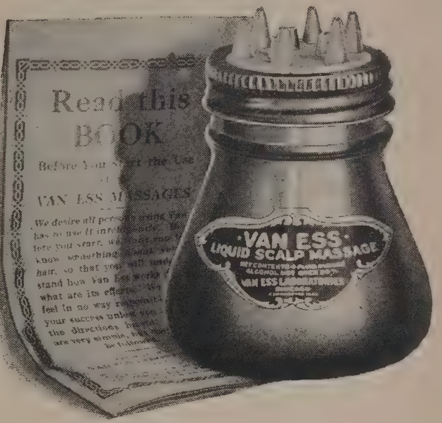

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—yet 90% needlessly, we claim

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"Why, Cousin Joan, you didn't get Guest Ivory abroad!"

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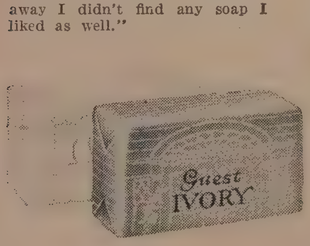

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MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1924

Vol. LXXXI NUMBER 2

Spending the Evening

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—A STORY OF THE NIGHT LIFE OF PARIS

By John D. Swain

Author of "The Last Man on Earth," "Billy Kane—White and Unmarried," etc.

IN a small chamber of an unpretentious hotel on the Rue Duphot, near the Madeleine, a young man was methodically packing his traveling bag.

He was a lanky, loose-jointed, tall, and rather good-looking American, studious and Middle Western in type. By vocation he was associate professor of French in Mansard, a fresh-water college of the coeducational group. He had chosen a small hostelry to which few foreigners came, because of its reasonable rates, and because all its staff spoke French. The morrow would mark the end of his two weeks' sojourn, and with characteristic thoroughness he was running over his diary and notebooks, to make certain that he had omitted nothing which properly belonged to his itinerary.

He had devoted an afternoon each to Fontainebleau and Versailles. Notre Dame and the Pantheon and the Invalides had been painstakingly done, and the Eiffel Tower ascended. One morning he had risen long before daybreak to see the Halles Centrales. The art galleries had not been forgotten. This very day he had paid his third and last visit to the Louvre, and even now his mind was throbbing with acres of the fat, creamy blondes of Rubens—ladies averaging, he guessed, about one hundred and eighty pounds to the hoof, and wearing few clothes, if any.

He shook his head impatiently, vexed that these luscious females should persist in wallowing in a sort of rustic gambol before his mind's eye; for Horace Barnes was not a ladies' man, and his principles were those which the Mansard faculty expected its incumbents to hold.

On one evening he had attended the Opéra. Another had found him enjoying a classic drama at the Odéon. On all the remaining nights he had sat in his room, reading ferociously along lines laid down when he was planning this, his first trip abroad.

"In the Footsteps of Du Maurier" had already been neatly packed in his bag, beside his socks. Carlyle's "French Revolution" followed it. "Les Misérables" and a couple of Molière's plays, in paper jackets, waited only until Horace's second suit of underwear should have been bestowed.

He paused to fill and light his pipe, and to take a final glance through his guidebook, with its maps and its detailed information on everything pertaining to the Queen City.

His eye fell upon a paragraph in the section devoted to amusements:

> Paris contains many resorts, garish or sordid, supported almost wholly by tourists, who have helped to foist upon the city an undeserved reputation for levity or licentiousness. The sight-seer comes expecting to find something racy, and the thrifty natives supply its ingenious counterfeit. In certain cabarets of Montmartre one may behold make-believe Apaches, artists' models, and starveling poets, who reap a generous harvest from the credulous.

He nodded in solemn agreement. He had always known this to be so; but he had not cheapened himself by gaping at scantily attired ladies whose nimble capers revealed much and promised more, nor had he shuddered to have some brooding figure in velveteen trousers and peaked cap pointed out to him as a famous murderer, mysteriously left at large by the highly intelligent police of Paris. Instead, he had spent his evenings in refreshing his mind by rereading classics of French literature, or weighty descriptions from the pens of famous travelers.

To-night, and for the first time—possibly because he realized that it was his last evening in Paris, perhaps because he was still pestered by the great Flemish painter's frank joyance in superabundant and amazingly healthy young flesh—he was tempted to look in on one of these cabarets, whose allure, for him, was safely neutralized by his knowledge that it was all a fake.

It would at least be amusing to watch other tourists being taken in, and to enjoy the feeling of superiority that one derives from such credulity in others. He would only stay for an hour or so, sipping a bock or a grenadine, deaf to the blandishments of the waiters urging him to buy poor champagne at an exorbitant price, and dismissing with the bland smile of sophistication any young woman who might mistake him for a lonesome goop yearning to listen to her artificial compliments and to buy expensive drinks for her.

His eyes strayed again to the open page of the guidebook. It contained a list of Montmartre resorts. The editor, having issued his warning, nevertheless would not deprive youth of its fling, if it must have it. Here they were, curiously named from animals or insects, alive or dead, with an equivocal tag invented to stimulate the stranger's curiosity.

The Floating Kidney, the Sick Toad, the Glue Pot, he solemnly inventoried them until, coming to L'Œuf d'Or, he paused.

"The Golden Egg—at least that doesn't sound repulsive," he thought.

He finished packing, put on his hat, and went below, to inquire of the *portier* as to the easiest way to reach the place afoot. The night was mellow, and he saw no sense in wasting money on a taxi. To-morrow he would be on his way to London. It might well be that he would regret it, if he had left Paris without so much as a passing glance at one of the dives to which the average tourist wings his way as soon as he has booked his room and changed his clothes.

The young professor strolled up the Avenue de l'Opéra, past the opera house, up the Chaussée d'Antin to the Rue de Clichy, and across the boulevard of the same name. It was a longish walk, but the gay crowds, the spirit of feverish unrest in the air, the smartly gowned women and swagger men who were hurrying to or from some place of amusement or refreshment, the elegant cars that purred up the hill slope, distracted his mind agreeably; and before he realized it he found himself opposite a dark, tunnel-like little street, down which, on the left, a huge illuminated yellow egg marked his destination.

Two minutes later, the watchful *patron* had sized him up in a swift *coup d'œuil* as he passed within.

"Young, alone, American, well dressed in loose-fitting tweeds, of a melancholy caste."

A snap of his pudgy fingers, and an alert *garçon* took him in charge. A little *chasseur* strove valiantly, but in vain, to secure his Stetson and walking stick. A *sommelier* bore down with the wine card, and Horace Barnes found himself seated at a little table for two, with the other chair tilted up against it.

All about him were other guests, laughing and singing or merely goggle-eyed, enjoying themselves or hoping to do so. Corks popped; glasses rang; an American jazz quartet proved that brass and wood instruments could be coaxed to emit sounds undreamed of by their inventors; and on a little platform at one end a small person bearing a large gilded *papier mâché* egg was nonchalantly smiling and waving recognition to acquaintances in the room.

The system proved too much for Horace's Spartan resolves. It was too smooth, too long established. With three attendants hovering near, and the important-looking bottles being decanted on all sides, he found himself too cowardly to order a mere *sirop*. He struggled feebly against a bland deference that would not be rebuffed, and was presently served with a celestial nappy of tripe, which nestled beneath a sauce of fine herbs and button mushrooms and oyster crabs, together with a dark bottle to whose opaque surface cobwebs had been skillfully transferred.

For the first and only time in his life he tasted tripe, but without knowing that he did so. He sipped a white wine that was not quite so good as the russet cider at home, despite its alleged vintage and its certain price. He lighted a cigarette, not sure of the propriety of his homely pipe in this place.

These highly essential details attended to, his eyes strayed to where the little girl was standing on her platform. He had not particularly noticed her in the bustle of getting himself settled; but now her impish beauty stirred something in his breast that had, this same afternoon, been surprisingly roused by the placid curves of Rubens's massive blondes.

Perhaps it was the very contrast that flogged his senses; for the *chanteuse* was slender, dark, with a touch of the gamin in her. Masses of soot-black hair were tossed in artful carelessness atop of her pert head. He noted that where it grew high on her neck there were no stray wisps, but a clean line as definite as if she wore a wig—which very manifestly she did not. Her eyebrows were of the same dull black, with the sweep of a raven's wings above her large, brilliant eyes. Her face was oval, the lips stained scarlet, the mouth large enough for a man-size kiss, the cheek bones a trifle higher than in the Anglo-Saxon type.

On the beach at Atlantic City, she would have been compelled to wear more clothes; but Horace boldly decided that she had on plenty. No stockings; there were dimples in her knees, and he could see the blue veins in her ankles where they disappeared into ridiculous fur-edged, high-heeled red shoes.

Her arms and shoulders were disturbing. He caught himself speculating upon the possibility of having her throw her arms about his neck, and cursed himself roughly, if silently. This wasn't at all like him! He was notoriously unobservant as to what women wore—or didn't wear—or, indeed, of anything about them save that they were either young or old, intelligent or otherwise.

Perhaps, he thought, there was something in the atmosphere of these places, something deliberately contrived, that made one sit up and take notice. Whatever it was, he was too honest to deny that he would deprive himself of many luxuries, and cut his itinerary ruthlessly, to have this radiant little hired provoker kiss him just once, and really want to do it!

Alarmed by turbulent impulses to which he was unaccustomed, he rather wished that he had stayed in his little room and finished "The Beginnings of Gothic Architecture." Martine's architecture — her whispered name had reached him by now from an adjacent table — was not at all Gothic, nor classic, either. It was—was—well, perhaps "rococo" would best describe it. Cunning—diminutive—with funny little curlicues and unexpected curves—*damn!* He fell to once more upon his disguised tripe.

Martine, unaware, perhaps—though not necessarily so—of the disturbance she had created in the bosom of the young American, was removing the top of her golden egg. From it emerged an extraordinary-looking cat. Its like Horace had never beheld. It was, in fact, of an Australian breed, with short, thick fur like plush, and mottled in design. It had no eyebrows or whiskers—which gave to its face a curiously wizened, sagacious appearance.

The animal stretched, yawned, and waited patiently, while its mistress attached to its neck the string to which the paper egg was fastened. Then it walked off stage towing the egg behind, and in the air, supported by a small balloon.

Even as the cat hopped down, Martine,

with her hands on her slender hips, leaning over the room with an impudent confidence, had begun to sing.

Even an associate professor of French finds himself following with some difficulty the evanescent *argot* of the Parisian boulevards. It changes overnight. It has double and even triple meanings concealed in its twisted phrases, its accents, its perverse vocabulary. It was well for Horace's peace of mind that he got but a little of Martine's meaning; but he got enough to make him turn red and feel ashamed, as if he had blundered into a boudoir, to find its dainty mistress rather more than half undressed.

He glanced furtively about him. Everywhere he beheld delighted glances, avid mouths, or the inane grin of those who comprehended not and bitterly regretted it. Nobody seemed offended; and in this atmosphere of complacency Horace gradually conquered his uneasiness, though not his distaste.

Somehow, coming from that perfect, smiling young mouth, through teeth that would have depressed a dentist, the words sounded infinitely worse than if overheard in smoking car or pool room. Yet, perversely, he still longed to touch her, to feel those gayly naughty lips close softly upon his own.

He was glad that he was alone. His feeling was so strong that he made sure it must reveal itself in his set features.

He carefully refrained from looking at her as, amid a roar of approval, she finished her encore and stepped down to the floor level. He feared lest through some diabolical feminine instinct she might catch his burning eyes, and, in the unconventional fashion which he had heard prevailed in cabarets, make her way to his table. This would be ecstatic, but terrible—also, probably, very expensive.

She did, in fact, come much nearer to him than he had expected.

Directly opposite him sat a couple to whom he had found his attention drawn more than once. The man, a mere boy, was unquestionably American, and from his dress and manners Horace guessed him to be a representative of our gilded youth. He was self-assured and rather noisy, and was engaged in drinking, one after the other, potent liquors of great variety, as suggested to him by his quieter but equally assured companion, a pretty enough blonde, who would hardly have qualified as a model for Rubens, but who was nevertheless a fair armful.

The nationality of this girl Horace could not guess. She spoke perfect French, and good, though somewhat bookish, English; and several times she had interjected phrases of some musical tongue to him unknown—Russian, possibly, he thought. She was clad in black velvet, and, attached to a slender chain, a single enormous diamond winked craftily upon her creamy breast.

Martine's songs had appealed to this pair; and now, as she stood talking with a man who, by his attire, was probably an example of the synthetic Apaches who lent local color to the Montmartre resorts, as set forth in the guide book, the young American sent his waiter to fetch the singer and her companion over to his table.

They came readily enough, sketchy introductions followed, and an instant *camaraderie* was established. It appeared that Martine had little English, the fellow with her none; so the conversation was carried on in French.

Horace's waiter leaned forward to breathe:

"That, *monsieur,* is Bastien, a desperate character. He is known to have garroted five men!"

"*Yeah!*" growled Horace Barnes. "Well, he'd better keep away from me, or I'll take him apart!"

Which sanguinary and most unprofessorial threat was lost on the *garçon.* Horace, surprised at his own grouchiness, was dismayed to realize that it was provoked by the free and easy terms on which Martine and Bastien seemed to stand.

At the other table, meanwhile, the American boy was inspired to order something unique. He suggested an old-fashioned whisky cocktail as sufficiently unusual for this place. Martine wrinkled her nose.

"And what is it that it is, this cocktail of yesteryear?"

The boy sighed gustily.

"Back in the dear, dead days of long ago, it was a real he-man's drink in God's country!"

He leaned toward the *sommelier,* who was never more than ten feet distant from his elbow, and began carefully and slowly to explain just what he required. There was no difficulty about the whisky or the bitters. The little cubes of ice were also to be had; but—the so very thick glass!

The *sommelier* shrugged, the youth loudly proclaimed that no real old-fashioned cocktail could be served in anything else.

The *patron* crossed over, listened obsequiously. Waiters scurried to the service pantry. In the end, they were able to produce only plain tumblers of thin glass. The American nearly wept, but manfully proceeded to mix, with utmost care, the venerable concoction.

They drank noisily and enthusiastically, though Horace noted that Martine shuddered slightly, and even Bastien looked grim as he downed the powerful blend.

Then a startling interruption banished from Horace's mind all thought of such trifles as drinks, old or new.

A shabby, long-haired, and not too clean man, garnished richly with whiskers, had risen to read one of his—as yet—unpublished poems, when suddenly the lights snapped off and the place was plunged into profound obscurity. In the startled silence which reacted to this unannounced number, the air was ripped as by a cold chisel when one of the girls—not Martine, Horace thought—screamed in terror, or in pain.

Horace half rose in his seat, his hand unconsciously pressed against the pocket where ticked his sixteen-dollar watch.

II

Only an instant could have elapsed when the lights winked on again. It was the *patron* whose hand was at the controlling fork, and he was angrily inquiring who had interfered with it.

Nobody seemed to know. A general confusion reigned, although only those in the immediate vicinity of Barnes understood what had happened. His eyes, guided by the scream in the dark, had turned swiftly to where the ill assorted quartet sat.

The girl with the young American sat bolt upright, one hand clutching her broken chain, her blue eyes distended with fear and anger.

"*My diamond!*" she gasped. "Somebody has taken it!"

Her escort, with a muttered exclamation, grasped her hand and pulled it away; and Barnes saw at once that the great solitaire no longer glittered upon her breast. The others, Martine and Bastien, sat quietly enough, their eyes fixed intently upon the dangling chain, while the *patron* crossed over to their table, his bushy eyebrows raised in inquiry.

"I—I felt a tug," the blond girl stammered, "the instant the lights went out. Even before they snapped on, I knew what had happened. It was all planned out!"

Barnes's compatriot whispered to his waiter, who nodded and shuffled rapidly to the street door, returning after a few minutes with a *sergent de ville*. Like his colleagues in every country where there are policemen, the *sergent* produced a little notebook and a pencil, and began to ask questions.

Who had turned off the light? Or, who was in a position to have done so?

Nobody was able to answer. The *comptoir* was in the corner beside the entrance. At its end, in the partition wall, was a swing door, which opened into a narrow hall leading to the kitchens. The electric switch was on the wall close beside this door. The *patron* was within reach of it, without leaving the seat he occupied. Indeed, he had reached out and turned the lights on within two or three seconds after they had gone out.

There were always waiters hurrying in and out of the service door, but all had alibis; nor could any guest recall seeing one near the door at the time.

A second police officer had joined the first by now, and the examination centered about the table itself. It was searched painstakingly, and the floor beneath it was scrutinized. Finally, after being taken into a little private office, Martine was rigidly searched with the assistance of the proprietor's wife, after which Bastien was overhauled from stem to stern.

The young American offered himself also, but his companion indignantly refused to permit him to suffer this indignity. The policemen then took his name and address, which he gave as Robert Underhill, a guest at the Continental Hotel. Together with the victim's address, this was entered in the little book.

Just as they were turning to leave, it occurred to one of them to take the names of those who sat nearest their table, one of whom was Horace Barnes. Beyond furnishing his address, and receiving a keenly appraising glance, he had no part in the interrogation.

The two agents were scarcely outside when Underhill and the girl left, accompanied to the door by the *patron,* who protested volubly that he was eternally desolated that so mysterious and unfortunate an incident should have occurred, for the first and only time, in his orderly and most respectable establishment.

When they had gone, Martine rose with a shrug, bestowed upon Bastien only the curtest of farewell nods, and, going to her little platform, helped to still the nervous chatter with one of her topical songs. Bastien himself had scarcely moved since returning from his search. He now sat slumped into his chair, his heavy lids lowered, a *caporal* drooping from one corner of his sullen mouth. He finished the dregs of his whisky cocktail, set the glass down, and thrust both hands into his trouser pockets, his face as expressionless as a wooden soldier's.

Horace found himself watching the fellow to the exclusion of all else. No longer was he exasperated by the outrageous frankness of Martine's song. He heard it without taking heed. He sipped his wine without knowing that he did so, and lighted a fresh cigarette automatically.

Bastien intrigued him. Despite his incredulity when the *garçon* had whispered of the man's criminal record, it seemed to Barnes that the Apache — real or make-believe—was most likely to have secured the solitaire. Of course, he couldn't have put out the lights. No doubt some accomplice had attended to that.

Horace would not permit himself to suspect the little singer; nor would it have been easy for her to reach across a wide table to where the blond girl lolled back in her chair, easily a distance of four feet, with a tall vase of cut flowers intervening. But Bastien's face was not one to inspire confidence. His eyes were shifty and cunning, his mouth thin and cruel, his chin weak. Thoroughly as he had been searched, Horace Barnes was not satisfied.

Of course—the vagrant thought crossed his mind—young Underhill might be the thief; but not if he knew anything about physiognomy, and nobody can teach young men and women for a period of years without learning something of that.

The girl herself might have taken advantage of the sudden darkness to hide the jewel, for purposes of her own—to get Underhill to buy her another, for example. Or, as one of the officers had suggested, a soft-footed, swift-handed pickpocket, knowing the exact second to act, might have leaped in, wrenched the solitaire from its frail chain, and been twenty feet away before the proprietor's hand found the switch. There were so many things that might have happened that only by arresting practically everybody present, and subjecting them to the adroit and severe interrogation for which Paris detectives are famous, could one hope for a solution.

These thoughts flitted through Horace's mind while he watched the inert Bastien, who of all concerned seemed the least interested. It was a pose, perhaps, or mere stolidity. At any rate, find who doused the lights, and you had the mystery solved!

Curious that no one had seen a hand reach out to turn the fork. Probably the fact was that more than one was in the secret, or at least sympathetic toward the criminal rather than the victim, and unwilling to testify.

Again, it was possible that the accomplice had never entered the room at all, but had lurked outside in the hall, exposing no more than an arm. The *patron* himself didn't look too scrupulous, so far as that went. He might have the stone even now, waiting to split the proceeds three or four ways later on, when convinced that the police were not pressing the hunt.

Just as Barnes grew tired of speculating and of staring fixedly at the back of Bastien's head, the latter moved. He slowly and lazily scanned the room. Apparently he found that he was for the time unobserved, save by Horace—who, sitting directly behind him, was able to busy himself with his menu when the Apache finally revolved completely in his chair and swept him within range of his vision.

The second that Bastien's eyes left him, Horace's were back on the job. They beheld a curious thing—one which Bastien made no effort to hide, and which would ordinarily attract no attention in this place, where the amenities of the table were not too scrupulously observed.

Reaching indolently toward the glass which stood before the place where the blond girl had but lately sat, Bastien thrust two dirty fingers into it, removed one of the little cubes of ice that were slowly melting there, and put the cube in his mouth.

The fact that made this act noteworthy was that there were similar cubes in all the glasses, including Bastien's. It was conceivable that he might wish to refresh himself with a morsel of ice, a rarity to the ordinary Frenchman; but why this particular piece?

The answer flashed back ineluctably—*because it was not a piece of ice at all.* Rather it was something that looked so much like ice that it had lain there all the time, under the eyes of the girl and of the police themselves!

The very name was revealing. The underworld of Paris, as Horace knew from reading much fiction, always spoke of diamonds as " ice." Lying just where Bastien had dropped it, amid cubes of ice not dissimilar in size or shape, it had been more effectively concealed than if cleverly palmed from hand to hand, to rest in some pocket in the far corner of the room. In the very simplicity of the device lay its beauty.

The blood sang in Horace's veins. The adventure had now reached out and taken him into its embrace. He was a part of it, and it remained with him to decide just what part that should be.

First of all, he must be prepared to move without delay. His hat and stick he had luckily retained. His reckoning—he must settle that!

Calling the *garçon,* he scanned the items with less care than he usually bestowed upon a bill, and vaguely felt that the charge was excessive. He paid, however, and added a tip so liberal that no argument could ensue. Meanwhile his eyes had not really left Bastien, who rose leisurely just as Horace got back his change.

The man's mouth was working slowly. Horace could have sworn that a fragment of ice would have been dissolved before this. If he felt any doubts, they departed when Bastien, having risen, stretched, yawned, and put his hand to his lips. Unmistakably the Frenchman carried something away from his mouth, and thrust it carelessly into his breeches pocket.

What should Horace do? Call the police again? Before they could arrive Bastien would have gone, and would be lost in the intricate network of Montmartre alleys. Boldly accuse Bastien, to his face or through the *patron?*

He glanced about the room. Here and there, amid the faces of tourists like himself, or honest-looking workingmen, were characters who looked as if they would enjoy nothing better than a rough house, in which no doubt knives and heavy boots would figure, and the amenities of the late Marquis of Queensberry would be held in derision.

Even as he hesitated, Bastien drew his cap from a coat pocket, settled it upon his bullet head, and sauntered toward the door, with a surly nod to the *patron.* Horace also rose, and followed, scarce heeding the proprietor's oily smile and his hope that *monsieur* would condescend to honor them in the future.

A glance thrown over his shoulder revealed Martine standing on her platform, with her song ended, and—as it seemed to him—with eyes unusually large and anxious fixed upon himself. As he turned, she stooped, picked up her odd-looking cat, and stepped down to the floor level, where he could see her no longer. Then he was out in the dark street, some fifty feet behind the figure of Bastien, which was no longer indolent and slouching, but was hurrying with long strides toward the Boulevard de Clichy.

Horace quickened his own steps, and Bastien, without looking around, broke into a half run. Thereupon, his mind made up, the American put his long legs into play, and rapidly overhauled the Apache—and just in time. The fellow was ducking into a little alley, a mere crack between two moldering old houses which reared many unlighted stories into the air. Down this vile hole not so much as a *bec de gaz* illumined the way.

A long arm shot out, and sinewy fingers bit into the Apache's coat collar. He twisted like an eel, and endeavored to slip out of its sleeves, leaving it as a hostage in his captor's hands. At once his ankles were smartly kicked aside, and he sat suddenly down on the *pavé.* His snaky eyes glittered up into Horace's, while one hand flashed to his belt.

" None of that, now, or I'll have to hang one on your jaw!"

The words were meaningless, but not the gesture of the knotted fist. Bastien knew by repute the amazing proficiency of the American fist—as soporific an instrument as a sandbag, when applied as these cursed foreigners knew how. He arrested his hand.

" Name of a name of a sacred dog! What does *monsieur* mean, then, assaulting innocent strangers on the streets of Paris? Does he perhaps think that he is in his beloved country, where such violence is esteemed a small matter?"

" *Attendez!*" Horace shook the whining creature, and advanced that hateful fist a little nearer Bastien's retreating chin.

"Give me that diamond you stole, and do it quick, or I'll drag you by the scruff till we come to a *sergent de ville!*"

Bastien protested. He knew not what the strange gentleman was talking about. Diamond? He was lucky if he saw a glass of bock and a dish of *pot au feu,* not to speak of precious stones—

Horace was excited, and a little afraid—not of his captive, but of the locality. At any moment that black alley might spew forth crouching figures, yearning to stick their long, sharp knives into the most sacred parts of himself. No policeman, nobody at all, in sight.

He did what perhaps he would not have done had there been time to reflect. He planted his fist squarely on the flat nose of the Apache. The blood gushed out, and Bastien howled with rage; but when the fist was raised again, he yielded. He dug into his pocket and produced the missing solitaire.

Even in that dim light, the stone glowed as if phosphorescent; but Horace did not stop to admire it. He thrust it into his own pocket, at the same time dragging Bastien to his feet and sending him on his way with a kick planted where its leverage was most effective.

In doing this, he roused a devil in the Frenchman that the blow, and even the rape of his loot, had not fully stirred. Bastien had been kicked! His *amour propre*—which, curiously enough, he possessed in full degree—was wounded unto death. He sped away down the street, but from time to time he looked back over his shoulder, his features inhuman with rage, and vitriolic words cascading from his bleeding lips.

"*Vieux crétin!*" he squealed. "Grandson of an illegitimate cauliflower! *Mort aux vaches!* Death to all spies!"

Even as Bastien's footfalls faded into the night, they were replaced by other and lighter ones. Horace turned, to behold the little singing girl from the Golden Egg. She still wore her cabaret costume, concealed under a long cloth cloak edged with cheap fur. She was breathing heavily, and was clutching to her breast the cat which had assisted in her act.

With her free hand she seized Horace's elbow, the small oval of her face looking up into his, her voice hoarse with emotion.

"You—you have it—the big diamond, *monsieur?*"

"Yes," he said simply. "So you knew that Bastien was the thief?"

Martine nodded.

"But not till I saw him take something from his mouth! *Cochon* that the *agent* was, imbecile not to look there when he searched him!"

Horace explained the trick whereby the Apache had concealed the jewel, while yet leaving it in plain sight. Martine nodded vigorously.

"Oh, he is of an intelligence, that *mauvais enfant!* I made sure he had stolen it, but where it was hidden I could not guess. Listen to me, *monsieur!* We have not a moment to lose. The diamond and your very life are not worth one small sou in this place. In five minutes, or less, perhaps, Bastien will have rallied a dozen of his cutthroats. He will not lose a stone as big as a *demi-tasse,* you can believe it! Hurry, then—you must give it to me!"

Horace smiled at the girl's imperiousness. How sweet she was! A child in size, and not much more in years, with eyes as clear and unspoiled as if she did not, night after night, sing untranslatable songs to the riff-raff of all nations in a third-rate dive. He wondered if she really understood the words herself.

A subtle perfume clung to her, brought out, perhaps, by the cool dampness on the Hill of the Martyr. One would naturally anticipate a powerful, exotic essence from a girl of the cabarets—something not merely arresting, but overcoming; but from Martine there stole the very breath of the shy places of the deep woods, where the little wild flowers lift their faces unafraid. She—

But Martine was speaking again—speaking vehemently, emphasizing her demands by stamping her ridiculous little high heels against the hard cobbles of the crooked old street.

"Give it me, *monsieur!* Now—before it is too late!"

Horace shook his head.

"If my life is in danger from having it in my pocket, then you are as good as dead if you carry it. If you think it prudent, we will return to the Golden Egg and send for a taxi-auto."

"But no—not there of all places! The room is full of Bastien's colleagues; and I do not propose to carry the diamond, me!"

He reluctantly delved into his pocket and handed it over. He was curious to see what it was that she proposed to do. Intoxicated though he was by her mere presence, by the touch of her fingers on his arm, by the curious perfume that clothed her—the aroma of youth itself, perhaps — he was hard-headed enough to speculate on the possibility that she wished to win what Bastien had lost, and that she might, after all, be in league with the Apache. If so, she could not get far before Horace's long legs would overhaul her.

He watched her avidly.

What she did was the very last thing he could have anticipated. With quick, sure fingers she knotted the big stone in his handkerchief, which she did not even bother to ask for, but snatched from his coat pocket where a corner showed. Then, holding the cat gently between her knees, she wound the handkerchief closely but not too tightly about its skinny neck. Straightening up, and dropping the cat, she clapped her hands sharply and cried:

"*Allons! Zut!*"

As if shot from a gun, the animal disappeared into the mouth of the selfsame black alley down which Bastien had all but made his escape.

Horace cried out, but too late. There, in his firm belief, disappeared forever the great solitaire—forever so far as he was concerned; but Martine, with a sigh of relief, smiled brightly up into his face.

"*V'là, monsieur!* It is done."

"I am, at any rate," he grimaced.

Her eyes widened.

"Wait! I shall tell you, my friend! Mimi Pinson can find her way home from any quarter of our Paris, and on the blackest night."

"Even so, somebody will pick her up."

"Nobody can move fast enough," Martine insisted. "Of course," she shrugged, "life is life. She might get herself shot—but who would waste powder on a whiskerless cat? Paris is full of cats to be had for a dish of skim milk."

"But how do you know she will go home? Cats like to stay out till all hours."

Martine pouted, and hung her head.

"Ah, but, *monsieur*, Mimi Pinson has a little one at home, a very hungry kitten. As you can figure to yourself, she will hurry. There is a drainpipe by which she can climb to my window, which is left open. *Comme ça!*"

Dancing up and down, and pretending to haul herself up into the air by her little hands, Martine gave so droll an imitation of a feline ascent of a gutter pipe that Horace laughed aloud, quite forgetting that his life was supposed to be in danger, and that he had just beheld a diamond which must be worth a great many thousand francs disappear down a pitch-black alley tied to a cat miles from home, for all he knew. But again, terror seized the *chanteuse*.

"Observe, *monsieur!* There — at the head of the street!"

His eyes strained into the darkness, at first seeing nothing. As he continued to stare, shadows moved, furtively, bodingly; and these presently crystallized into half a dozen crouching figures running humped up, infinitely sinister, with an apelike menace in their approach.

Looking the other way, as she whirled him about with astonishing strength, another little knot of black figurines detached itself from the obscurity, and moved to cut off their retreat back toward the Golden Egg, whose bloated sign, exuding a sickly yellow light, now filled him with repulsion.

He heard Martine suck in her breath with a shrill hiss. His own fists clenched, even as their futility smote him — when, with a roar that turned his heart to water, a throng of nondescript figures came pouring down a staircase before whose penthouse they stood, and overflowed onto the *pavé* with whoops and snatches of song and repartee.

In an instant he was in the midst of what appeared to be a throng of inmates escaped from a madhouse. He was swept onward, though he braced his feet and clutched wildly at the penthouse upright. Suddenly he observed his companion was clinging to one arm, her voice rising in joyous welcome to the outlandish chorus, her feet moving with theirs. Had she, too, gone mad? Was all the world mad on the Martyr's Hill, to which he had come, in a moment of weakness, from the staid security of his little hotel room?

"It is an affair extraordinary!" the little *chanteuse* was crying in his ear. "*Bonne chance,* is it not? Come then, *mon brave!* We are saved!"

It was three blocks farther along before Horace got even an inkling of what it was all about. Talking was none too easy in this bedlam. Only by broken sentences, fragments jerked from Martine's teeth as she was dragged wildly over cobblestones and around sharp corners, did he discover that by rare fortune they had been swept up into a crowd of artists, who had been paying one of their periodical visits to their confreres, *les Montmartrois*.

These, it appeared, were true Bohemians—painters and their models; a budding dramatist or two, some fellows from the School of Law, and a pianist with dirty finger nails, and the madness of genius in his eyes. They had been making an evening of it, not at a vulgar cabaret—which most of them could ill afford—but in a big studio *sous les toits*, with their Montmartre hosts, drinking thin, sour wine and good sound Normandy cider, eating salads and little•cakes, smoking villainous tobacco, and releasing their complexes in innocent abandon and frank *camaraderie*. They were just boys and girls, with some few *anciens*, honest in their emotions, and real workers. For them conventions did not exist—only traditions. Not one of them was intoxicated or obscene; nor was one of them hampered by prudishness.

Now they were *en route* to their own Latin Quarter; and, by joining them, Horace and his little comrade would be not merely safe, but perfectly welcome. Already they had been tacitly accepted.

Horace had thrown an arm about Martine, the crush being so great that he feared that she might be torn away from him. His other arm was clutched fervently by an old fellow with floating white whiskers and a nose so alarmingly crimson that it almost served as a torch for their feet. Far ahead, some one had a tin flute. At his back a couple of guitars wept in a genteel, operatic sort of way, suggesting hopeless passion and rusty iron bars.

They swung, six abreast, spilling well out into the roadway, down the Rue de Clichy and across the Rue St. Lazare to the Chaussée d'Antin. As they entered the Rue Montmartre, they broke spontaneously into one of the medieval Latin students' songs—"Integer Vitæ."

The grim houses flung back the sonorous stanzas. From dark windows, nightcapped heads popped out to listen and approve. They passed St. Eustache, silent and aloof. Horace's mind swam in a sort of ecstasy. He was surrounded by a vibrant life that he had never known, and had become a part of it.

In the rank ahead a tall artist leaned down to kiss the ready lips of a little girl wearing sabots and a coarse, clean frock. At Horace's left, Martine looked provocatively up, her head tilted back, her eyes smiling. He bent over, and their lips clung for a long moment, while the old man on his right clapped him on the back and heartened him in a cracked voice.

He was old Papa Poussin, the veteran said—a sculptor of parts, whose classicism was no longer popular in these days of cubists and vorticists. But what matter? Did he not earn a modest sum teaching drawing at the Beaux Arts? Was he not invited to every revel of the Rive Gauche, and held in affection by all these, his children?

His eyes moistened, his rubicund nose gleamed terrifyingly. Horace noted that his trousers were frayed, but he wore clean spats, and his frock coat, worn to the nap, was spotless.

For an instant a horrible vision came to the young American. It seemed to him that the street, on either hand, was lined with members of the faculty of Mansard, chilly, minatory, their noses lifted, their scornful eyes repudiating him. What was he, the taciturn professor of French, the bachelor with whose name no romance had ever been associated—much less any scandal—doing here in the night, his feet capering uncouthly, his lips still moist from a kiss that made his blood sing as from a draft of heady wine? But the thought vanished even as it formed.

The pedestrians paid no more attention to the paraders than to smile indulgently. There was nothing grotesque about their actions, in the eyes of the citizens. They belonged to Paris—old Paris, with its smiles and tears.

Presently they emerged into the region of the Halles Centrales. Here already the market gardeners were gathering, purveyors to the vast maw of Paris. There was a smell of damp straw and spicy apples, of garlic and cheese. Great Percheron horses munched from feed bags, and here and there a carter lay asleep beneath his wagon. A golden pyramid of cheeses was being laid by three uncannily spry old women. Butchers were setting their stalls, impaling their carcasses. Somewhere a cock crowed defiantly.

Before an aged dame, the students drew up. Three of them—painters who shared a studio—were bargaining for an enormous cheese. After a wordy battle they paid over sundry francs and sous and pink and blue scrip, and became the possessors of an enormous Swiss cheese, the size of a cart wheel.

"Winter comes apace," declared their spokesman. "One must be prepared. With this emperor of all cheeses, we cannot starve! It is the concentrated nourishment of many flocks and herds."

A dark-haired young fellow stepped forth from the ranks. He suggested that when they bore this colossal prize past the Palais de Justice, agents of the Prefecture would be certain to interrogate them. Therefore he, Aristide Moulin, student of law, would draw up a receipt to be signed by *madame*, which they could show to the police.

Some one thrust a sketching pad into his hand. He set to work beneath a flambeau, and presently framed a pompous and highly technical instrument, conveying in full legal phraseology all title whatsoever in the purchase to the three students of art. This, amid laughter and jests, was signed by the old woman's crabbed fist, and sealed by a gob of tallow from a stump of candle that some one carried in his pocket, to light his way up innumerable flights.

The young lawyer then made an eloquent speech in honor of the transaction. His eyes glistened, perspiration bedewed his brow. Carters with smoking pipes gathered to listen approvingly. Horace felt that never had he listened to purer or more moving French idiom.

Abruptly, the peroration came; and then, the cheese being too heavy and bulky to carry, it was trundled along like a hoop. It was tough and resilient, and bounded absurdly from the uneven paving, but its cloth casing held firmly.

Through the Place du Châtelet, with the ancient Tour St. Jacques to their left, across the Île de la Cité — the Lutetia, which was an ancient city when Cæsar's legions invested it—over the Pont au Change and the Pont St. Michel, and so to the "Boul' Miche," the main thoroughfare of the Latin Quarter.

Here the company began to dissolve like a snowball in sunshine. Singly, by couples, in little groups, they broke away, to enter forbidding-looking alleys and *impasses*, where were their lofty studio homes. Almost as suddenly as this prodigious adventure had begun, it was over!

In less than an hour Horace had learned more of the real Paris than he had from all his reading and all his routine sight-seeing. For this brief moment he had merged into its life stream. More—he had been permitted to step back into the Middle Ages.

Martine guided him to the left.

"*Voici, chéri!* It is here that I live."

They had come to the Rue Soufflot. All their companions had vanished. From the street they turned into a dark *cul-de-sac*, and presently stopped before a tall, shabby-looking, unlighted house.

Martine held his hand as they began to climb the steep, worn stairs. Each hall was dimly lighted by a single gas jet, turned low. At the second landing, he fancied that he heard stealthy steps behind them, and paused uncertainly, looking back over his shoulder. He could see nothing, and the sound—if sound it was—had ceased. They resumed their climb.

At the very top the girl unlocked a door made from a single heavy plank boldly carved by some forgotten hand. A breath of night air from an open window greeted them; but it was pitch dark within.

"Wait while I find a light," she whispered, leaving Horace just inside the door.

He heard the sound of a vesta, and presently the wick of a great candle caught flame. For an instant Martine stood bathed in the faint glow, like a vision surrounded by the black curtains of sleep. Then the flame steadied and increased, and the homely little cubicle was visible, with its low, sloping ceiling, a curtained bed, two or three cheerful oil sketches on the white walls — gifts of some artist — and, blinking serenely and singing drowsily upon a scrap of rug, Mimi Pinson, nursing a tiny replica of herself.

Even as they cried out in satisfaction to note that the cat still bore the handkerchief knotted about her neck, there came a strange diversion. From beneath a great black oak dresser scuttled a venturesome mouse. Instantly Mimi Pinson was afoot, leaving her unhappy offspring tumbled upon his back, his little pink tongue out, making futile sucking noises.

The terrified mouse darted toward Horace. Martine promptly climbed the nearest chair; and a second later the cat shot past, and out into the hall.

An old football instinct to "follow the ball" sent Horace lunging after, almost before the impulse had formulated itself. He leaped into the corridor, fetched staggeringly up against a dark figure lurking beyond the door, and was grasped in wiry arms. A desperate wrench brought them crashing into the guard rail of the stairs. It yielded with a shrill protest, and down into the blackness they fell, locked together like a pair of snarling dogs.

Horace fell beneath, and a wave of nausea swept him as the back of his head rammed a stair tread. Half conscious, it seemed to him that the faint flicker of a knife blade menaced him from above; and then oblivion took him into her arms.

III

At first, upon opening his eyes, Horace fancied that the sharp gleam of a knife blade still played before them; but as his senses steadied, he recognized the infinitely more brilliant refulgence of the great diamond solitaire. He was lying on his back upon a couch, his head softly pillowed, a soothing coolness binding his brow, the smilingly solicitous face of Martine bending low over him, the while she displayed the stone by the light of a great candle set upon a stand.

He sought to rise, but was prevented by a sense of giddiness, as well as by the girl's gently restraining hand.

"Repose thyself, *monsieur,*" she urged. "Thy head still sings from thy hard fall."

"What happened?" he breathed, looking wonderingly about.

"That *scélérat* of a Bastien had followed us here! Did I not say that he would not easily give up this prize? But I was in time to stay his hand, and to speed him on his way with a hatpin. Mimi came back with her prey, and, what is better for us, with the jewel!"

Horace felt tenderly of his head. He had evidently escaped with nothing worse than a severe bump. Despite Martine's protests, he insisted upon sitting up, and after drinking a little glass of wine he was nearly himself once more.

"What shall we do?" he asked. "It will not be safe to leave the diamond here to-night. Ought I not to call a *sergent* and turn it over to him? And you—you must go to some hotel for the night. Bastien may come back, and with help."

Martine smiled slowly, and shook her head.

"Listen, *monsieur.* We have much to do to-night, you and I. First light your cigarette, and rest quietly on this old *chaise longue,* which may — who knows? — have sheltered the gracious Pompadour once upon a time; for I have a tale to relate."

Impatiently he allowed himself to be disposed upon the battered but once beautiful lounge chair, with a pillow at his neck, while the girl held before him a paper spill to light his cigarette.

Again her witching perfume stirred his pulse. Slender, soft, yet intensely vital, feminine to the last degree, but utterly fearless and resourceful, she troubled his spirit more than he liked to admit.

Again came the fleeting thought of his situation, as stated in terms of the Mansard College standard. The hour was hard upon midnight. The little chamber was intimate with the personality of the girl of the cabaret. The bed she slept in stood curtained in its corner, with an air of discreet expectancy. Her garments were flung upon chairs, or hung from hooks in a shallow closet, whose door stood half open. Upon the floor Mimi once more nursed her baby. And he—a professor who had met the rigid character tests demanded by the Mansard faculty—reclined upon his back, smoking lazily, an empty wineglass at his elbow, as if he belonged in the picture!

A flashlight of him would be enough. No defense, no alibi, would avail. He was not sure that he could frame one that would not sound absurd.

Had he not ventured out upon this, his last evening in Paris, he would have returned home with his notebooks filled with sedate observations, but his knowledge of the ancient city would have been little more than one can glean from attending an illustrated lecture, or pursuing a course of selected readings. He was expected to give a lecture before the students and the faculty—and the faculty's wives—upon "My Impressions of Europe," or something equally futile! And he could see himself upon the platform of their chapel back home, clearing his throat with a drink of water, and platitudinizing:

"There are, in Paris, certain cabarets and resorts patronized exclusively by tourists, who fondly imagine that in them they are beholding types of that underworld which exists solely in the imaginations of the writers of lurid fiction—"

But Martine was speaking. She sat disturbingly close to him, patting his hand from time to time, for emphasis. Her breath played warmly over his face as he listened.

"It is true, as *monsieur* has said, that the diamond must not remain here to-night.

It is I who shall tell you what we will do, you and I; but first, I tell you the truth. Me, I will not deceive you!"

She paused to trim the wick of the great candle. A strand of her hair, odorous, alive, caressed his cheek as she leaned across him. He stirred restlessly, his cigarette burning unheeded between finger and thumb.

"I am not French," Martine resumed. "I will not, if you please, reveal my true name. Enough that I was born with Romanoff blood in my veins. I was destined to have servants, my carriage, a little palace, a husband with many medals strung across his breast; but the fates decided otherwise. And so I am Martine, a singer at the Golden Egg — and worse places. I crave *monsieur's* sympathetic attention.

"This much I shall tell you. My uncle, Leonid Orlovski, was once — and not so many years ago—ambassador of Russia to France. He was unmarried, and I, his little niece, was his pet and favorite. Though unmarried, my uncle was a very human type, you can believe it! While he lived in great pomp at the embassy, he maintained another and more homelike establishment in a section of Paris where the utmost discretion prevails. He belonged, in short, in his hours of relaxation from the duties of state, to the Rue Marbeuf."

This allusion was intelligible to the listener. He knew that while there is a very real street of that name, it has become something more than a thoroughfare. It has acquired a symbolism.

In this, it has many exemplars. Every one can fashion a list for himself. "Wall Street decrees this or that," we say, intending to connote a financial system rather than a locality. In the same way, we familiarly refer to French and English politics as the machinations of the Quai d'Orsay and of Downing Street. The Gold Coast of San Francisco and the Bowery of New York had, in the old days, meanings apart from municipal topography; and when the wives of faculty members of Mansard speak of Fifth Avenue, they certainly forget that the name was, originally, a mere numeral.

Therefore Horace understood at once that Orlovski, the Russian ambassador, had an irregular household in the Rue Marbeuf, where frock-coated, silk-hatted gentlemen of the utmost importance passed one another without bowing, and where, amid an air of surreptitious reserve, beautifully gowned ladies possessed everything their hearts could desire, save only a *name.*

Martine perceived that she need not enlarge upon her uncle's human frailty.

"All this was not so very long ago, you understand," she continued. "The terror which has swept the old Russia away is of yesterday. Most of those who knew my uncle are living. Many of them are still young. *Par exemple*—and this may surprise you—the blond girl at the Golden Egg, she who lost this diamond, was the very one who—"

Horace sat up as if galvanized.

"No! You don't mean—"

"But yes, *monsieur!* I know her, though she has no idea that I am anything but what I seem to be. She still lives in the pleasant realm of the Rue Marbeuf; for my uncle left to her the small but exquisite mansion in which, but a few years ago, he was found dead. It was his heart, *monsieur*—too susceptible, no doubt. The police, you may assure yourself, proved that his death was natural. There was no foul play. There were papers of state in his pocket, their seals unbroken. His money and rings were upon him.

"His body was secretly removed, at night, and the news given out that he had died respectably at the embassy. Few besides the police, his valet, and me — his niece—know the truth. He left me well provided for. I was his heiress, in truth; but, as *monsieur* well knows, great estates and castles and moneys in Russia melted away when the Bolshevists arrived. From one of the wealthiest women of Paris—on paper—I became Martine, a *chanteuse.* All our family was wiped out; nor could my aristocratic friends help me. They had enough trouble to find bread for their own mouths!"

Martine lowered her voice, leaning closer to Horace. She glanced fearfully about, as if apprehensive of eavesdroppers.

"Once, when I was a young girl in a convent school, my uncle took me to this establishment of his." She put her fingers on Horace's mouth to still his instinctive protest. "Listen, *mon ami*—it was for a purpose. The girl, Anna Pignotti, was at Monte Carlo, and the house was quite empty. And my uncle showed me a secret cabinet, a cunning place hidden in the bookcase of a little *salle de réception,* which he had had made to hold certain private papers, as well as securities and gold and even jewels. He told me that if ever harm befell him, I alone knew of this secret, and I must obtain the valuables and destroy the papers. The rest was all mine; for, as I have told you, he had made me his heiress."

"And you think that this girl, Anna Pignotti, has not found them—that they are still intact? Then why do you not go to the authorities and claim what is yours?"

Martine shook her head sadly.

"I am sure that the Pignotti has no suspicion of any secret hoard; but as for legal help, that is not to be thought of. My uncle having left the establishment to her, she would of course claim this as a part of it. Besides, it is highly important, both to the honor of my family and the future plans of the Romanoff party, that the papers should not fall into the hands of a *gamine* like her, especially since all her intimates are of the Lenine camp. It is almost equally to be desired that they should not be seen by the French police. It is necessary that I should obtain the box secretly. I have planned how to do this, many times, but without help I could not; so I waited. To-night, *monsieur, le bon Dieu* brought you, and pointed the way!"

Horace blinked.

"Me?" he asked feebly. "But how?"

"Simply enough, *mon brave!* It is the hour of fate. We have the great diamond of the Pignotti, given to her, very likely, by my poor uncle himself; and by returning it, to-night, before the police trace it here, I have at last the opportunity to enter the house on the Rue Marbeuf. So, if *monsieur's* head is restored, we will go there now, by taxi-auto, and win Anna's gratitude, and, if all goes well, recover my little inheritance!"

"But even so, even when we are admitted, what chance will you have to open a secret panel and make off with the contents? There is bound to be somebody about—if not Anna, then a servant."

"It is a chance," Martine admitted, "but it is our only one, and it is better than it sounds. I have told you that the secret cabinet is in the little reception hall, to which we, as visitors, are sure to be conducted. Once within, it will take me but an instant to get what I want. I know just where it is, and just how to open it. Anyhow, we must take what the gods send. Trust me to seize the opening, however slight, when it comes!"

Every instinct warned Horace to have nothing to do with the girl's project. He had nothing to win, everything to lose. He shuddered as he pictured the scene—a call paid to entire strangers, himself seated with a little cabaret singer, in a house where he had no business to be. The servant would depart to announce the arrival of visitors close on to midnight. For a brief instant, possibly, they would be alone, with Martine feverishly fiddling with a secret spring, the mechanism of which she might have forgotten, or which might stick from long disuse. Then the mistress of the house, or perhaps some male guest, or a sardonic manservant, would appear in the doorway. An alarm would be given, the police would arrive, and there would be nothing but the Arabian Nights story of a girl of no social standing whatever—her unsupported word—between the American and sheer ruin! His blood turned cold.

And yet against this there was the intangible but irresistible appeal of the girl herself. Horace felt that in her presence he could deny her nothing. By the crook of one of her soft little fingers, by the inflection of her mellow voice, by the perfume of her lovely body, she could lead him into wilder schemes than this, forlorner hopes! Even as his hard common sense shrieked protest, he knew that he was lost.

There was one bright spot—he would at least get rid of that cursed diamond, the possession of which put their lives in the peril of the organized Apaches of Paris. And perhaps, once inside the house, they would not be ushered into that dangerous room at all; or, if so, they would not be left alone. In that case, they could leave without the secret box, but also with no reproach attaching to himself.

He sighed, and surrendered.

"I'm all right now," he said, rising to his feet. "And it is already late enough. Let's go!"

Martine cooed, and before he realized her intention she had thrown warm arms about his neck. Again, and on a lingering kiss, the professor's soul soared to the celestial spheres, no longer his well disciplined spirit, but the plaything of a girl whom he had known for less than two hours.

IV

HORACE felt rather futile as they rolled smoothly across the Pont de la Concorde. Martine had taken full charge of the expedition. Late as it was, there were plenty of taxis about, but, despite her hurry, she passed five before selecting a somewhat out-at-elbows machine with a chauffeur who looked as if he ought to be doing time. Once within, she became abstracted, and answered her companion irrelevantly or not at all. She seemed, indeed, if not cold, at least indifferent.

After proceeding about halfway up the Champs Élysées, their car turned into an elegantly demure little cross street, lined with small but obviously luxurious houses. Three or four blocks down, they were backed into a service alley barely wide enough to admit them. They came to a pause in partial darkness, with rows of wooden doors on either hand, opening into kitchen areas.

Martine seemed to awaken.

" We have arrived," she said simply.

For a moment Horace wondered if she had changed her plans, and proposed to effect a burglarious entrance from the servants' quarters; but after a few whispered words to the surly chauffeur she turned and led the way back to the little street, one of those parallel to their more famous sister, the Rue Marbeuf.

Wherever a window was lighted — and many were — shades were close drawn. The quarter seemed deserted, although behind them the lights of countless big cars flashed up and down the Champs Élysées. Not another word did Martine speak until, pausing before one of the smallest but most ornate *maisonnettes*, rather Byzantine in its style, she whispered:

" *And this is the house!*"

Horace scanned its façade. A light glowed over the door, but all the windows were dark, save two on the third floor. Martine, too, had noted this, and it seemed to lighten her abstraction.

" They do not entertain downstairs. That means that our chances are good," she asserted.

Horace understood her. Provided they were shown into the reception room, a little respite must ensue ere any one came below to inquire as to their errand at such an hour; but would they succeed in getting inside the door, until scrutinized by the Pignotti woman?

So far as he was concerned, it would have pleased him better to see the place lighted up like a Christmas tree, with jazz music bursting from every opening. Not that he didn't wish to see Martine get her box; but he had never been able to share her optimism. One didn't thus easily enter strange houses and walk out of them with gold and jewels and valuable papers—not in real life, anyhow.

An enormous footman answered their ring—a man not as tall as Horace, but broad almost to the point of deformity. His shoulders rubbed against the lintels on either hand as he stood, obsequious yet somehow hostile, as one accustomed to pass upon strange visitors, to admit some with alacrity, and to kick others as far as the avenue—or farther.

" *Monsieur desire—*" he purred.

" I regret that I have no card," the American answered in French, as the girl had instructed him. " Be so good as to inform Mme. Pignotti that I have come to return her diamond."

The fellow was for once taken aback. He drew in his breath with an astonished hiss. Then, recovering himself, he stepped aside for them to enter. Five seconds later he was holding back a heavy portière and indicating a tiny room at the right, at the same time flooding it with light.

" If *monsieur* and *madame* will give themselves the trouble to seat themselves?"

They did so, and in a moment they heard the footsteps of the serving man rapidly and lightly ascending the wide stairs that swept up from the entrance hall.

Martine rose from the ivory and mother-of-pearl chair into which she had indolently sunk. Her eyes blazed with excitement. She wasted no time in words, but swept Horace with a triumphant glance as she fairly leaped toward the farther end of the little room.

Here was a built-in bookcase of some half a dozen shelves. The volumes were elaborately bound and tooled, a trifle dusty, looking as if nobody had disturbed them of late, not even a maid with feather brush.

It could not have been more than ten seconds after the servant had left before Martine had wrenched at the second shelf, swinging it out from the wall. Thrusting her arm into the space left, her fingers quested nervously, while a little frown corrugated her brow.

To Horace the situation was ghastly with portent. Every instant he expected to hear steps descending the stairs, or shuffling up the hall. The room seemed full of unseen eyes and straining ears.

His own senses were abnormally acute. For the first time he noted the ticking of a clock somewhere in another room. He even heard his own watch, and marveled at the amount of noise it made. His nostrils quivered to a new odor—some fervent scent based on musk. It had probably been left by the Pignotti.

His eyes caught a cobweb in the corner of the ceiling, where squatted a little drab spider, while a green bug moved erratically toward it. From time to time the insect would pause, as if considering. Then it would move on an inch. To Horace, it symbolized in some queer way his own situation. If the green bug became enmeshed, and fell a prey to that sinister drab killer, it would mean that he, too, Horace Barnes, was lost; but so long as the bug was immune, so was he!

With anguish he watched it rather than the patient search of Martine's fingers. The little insect touched the outer strand of the web. It quivered, but the spider did not move. Not yet—not until the victim had utterly compromised itself!

A gasp recalled him from his absurd studies in natural history. Martine had faced about, her sleeve black with dust, her lips parted, one hand outstretched and clutching a small, thin, black japanned box, such as one sees in safe-deposit vaults. Simultaneously there was born in her eyes a look of mingled cupidity and terror; and at Horace's left, a shrill voice cried:

"Mikhail!"

The girl Anna stood in the doorway, her eyes dilated, her nostrils pinched. She seemed utterly astonished. It occurred to Horace that she might have stood there unobserved for some time before she had thought to call for help.

Well, the worst had happened! He crushed down an insane impulse to look up and see whether the little green bug was already in the clutch of the drab spider; and then Martine flashed past him, almost upsetting him, as he struggled up from his chair.

The *chanteuse* held her precious box under her left arm. With the other, she seized Anna's frock at the neck, ripping it almost in one piece from her plump shoulders, dragging her about sidewise, and then sending her with a violent thrust back into the hall. There she reeled three or four steps and collapsed upon the stairs, down which she must have just come, though neither of them had heard her. There followed the rasp of the great front door, and Martine dashed out of the house.

As Horace darted into the hall, it was empty; but before he could escape, the footman appeared from another room across the hall. The big man's eyes seemed to take in everything at a raking glance—his mistress lying disheveled upon the lower stair, Horace himself in evident flight, the door left wide open by Martine. Heavy as he was, he was not slow; and he instantly blocked the exit with his great body, thrusting out enormous hands covered to the finger tips with black hair.

Already in motion, Horace did not check. As he had done hundreds of times on freezing November fields, he dropped his head and leaped forward like a battering ram. Thus, as a tackle, he had been used to head the interference; but now, all rules being suspended, he threw up his elbow, driving its sharp, bony point into Mikhail's midriff.

With a sound like that of a deflating tire, the great mass of bone and flesh toppled down, carrying Horace beneath it; but the wind was driven completely from the servant's body, and he could do nothing hostile until he got it back. Grabbing his hat—even in his excitement he retained the instinct to leave no incriminating evidence behind him—the American crashed out of the doorway, down the steps, and into the night.

Martine was not in sight. Already she must have gained the little service alley where their taxi-auto was parked. Horace sped down the street toward it, conscious that he was, in the eyes of the law, neither more nor less than a thief fleeing from the scene of his crime.

Fortunately, on this quiet street, he was practically unobserved. An aged telegraph messenger had alighted from his bicycle, and paused momentarily to stare at the foreigner with vacuous eyes. Horace could see the dispatch dangling limply from one hand as he went past.

Then, with a jangle of gears and a violent cough, the taxi-auto got under way. It shot out of the alley just ahead, went into full speed, and disappeared.

From the house behind came the drumming of feet and a hoarse cry. Without turning around to look, Horace kept on and rounded into the Champs Élysées. There was no further sign of pursuit, and he slowed down to a walk.

The clocks were striking two when he passed the sleepy *portier* of his little hotel on the Rue Duphot. He was wringing wet with perspiration, and nerve-racked with the constant fear of feeling upon his shoulder the arresting hand of the law. He could not blame Martine for not waiting for him, considering the vital need she had of escaping with her treasure; but he felt a little hurt that she had not looked back to see if he, too, had made his get-away.

In his dreams he was taking her home as his bride to Mansard, and she was blithely crossing its campus, a cigarette jauntily stuck between her red lips. Even members of the faculty were not permitted to smoke on the campus. There was no rule as to the use of tobacco by their wives, because such a possibility had never occurred to Mansard; but the professor of geology had lost his twenty-year position when his wife won an atrocious silver-plated water pitcher at a bridge tournament. In Horace's dreams, she gibbered at Martine, and the dean came to him as man to man and advised him to commit suicide.

V

It was nearly ten o'clock when he awoke, unrefreshed, and with a bewildered uncertainty as to whether the events of the hectic night before had not all been part of some nightmare. This was the morning, he reflected, that was to have seen him upon his way to London. His bag, ready packed save for a few last toilet accessories, stood upon the table.

It was not of London that he thought as he dressed, but rather of the little singing girl, whom he must see as soon as possible. His heart sank as he pictured her already a possible prisoner, her tiny attic chamber inhabited solely by the wondering Mimi and her kitten.

He descended to the empty dining room for *déjeuner à la fourchette.* The exertions and anxieties of the previous night had at least left him with a healthy American appetite.

He was already attacking his second egg when the waiter brought him a card engraved with the name " M. Arnault Lapierre," with the words " Service de l'Identité Judiciaire " in the lower left-hand corner.

" He is very anxious to see *monsieur* at once," the *garçon* said.

Horace turned pale. So the police had tracked him down, just as he fancied all was well!

He bade the waiter show M. Lapierre in, and resumed the eating of his egg, for which all appetite was gone.

The man who presently followed the waiter to his table was not one whom Horace would have associated with criminal investigations. He was a small, elderly gentleman, dressed in old-fashioned style, and with mild, almost vacant brown eyes. He might have been a collector of rare butterflies or odd volumes; but—a detective!

Horace rose punctiliously.

" Will M. Lapierre perhaps join me?" he asked, trying to appear casual.

The visitor had, it appeared, breakfasted long since, but he would, with permission, seat himself and—if it was not objectionable — indulge himself by smoking while Mr. Barnes finished his repast.

" I felt that it would perhaps be pleasanter to talk here than at the Prefecture," Lapierre explained.

Horace swallowed hard.

" Wha-what was it y-you want to know?" he gulped.

The little man did not instantly reply. His mild eyes wandered about the drab, uninteresting room with the gentle curiosity of a child. He drew a paper packet from his pocket, and selected a thin, black cigar, which he lighted with care. A villainous smoke curled up as he leaned back.

" I have understood that *monsieur* is leaving our city this morning?" he inquired, when the cigar was drawing freely.

" I—why, I did think of going—at least, before long."

Lapierre nodded.

" The fact must excuse this so unreasonable call."

Horace was alarmed by the strange manners of the little man. Not thus had the limbs of the law acted in such fiction as he had read. They bullied, they browbeat, or else they wormed their way into their victims' confidence. He waited apprehensively for Lapierre to go on.

" I am, *monsieur,* as you doubtless understand, a *mouche* — what you in your droll idiom call a ' fly cop '; but I am not at all mysterious. To prove this, allow me to lay all my cards upon the table. First, let me say that you puzzle me greatly. I find myself intrigued. It must be that I grow old, and inquisitive, and garrulous. Also, my mind falters, and I can no longer rely upon my imagination, as of old. Things that once I flatter myself would have been clear now involve me in vague doubts.

"You, *monsieur*, are registered as a professor of our noble tongue in your own country. You come to Paris, and lead an exemplary, even a monastic, life. You honor our great national monuments with sympathetic study. You spend much time in our justly admired museums and galleries. During the evenings, you remain in your room, hard at work. You do not sally forth at night, with a guide, to amuse yourself with the more bizarre, *risqué* frivolities spread for the young visitor's enjoyment—and his francs."

Lapierre had been gazing fixedly at the tablecloth, at a spot where it had been mended with that miraculous neatness which is a secret of the French seamstress. Suddenly he raised his eyes and looked into the American's.

"Last night, contrary to your custom, you emerge from your solitary vigils. Even so, you have no secret *liaison*, you do not seek out any of the more questionable haunts beloved of tourists. You merely select one of our Montmartre cabarets, and there, alone, you dine and look on. Presently, at a table close to yours, a clever theft perpetrates itself. A valuable diamond disappears as by magic. The police are called, and search is made, but in vain. Thereupon the victim and her escort leave.

"Up to this point, *monsieur* has been merely an interested observer; but now, with one Bastien sitting alone at the table, you prove yourself to be both acute and resolute. It is your eyes which penetrate the ingenious manner in which the diamond has been hidden. Why, then, did not our agent discover it, you perhaps ask? *Hélas!* It is for such reasons that the good fellow will always be a *sergent de ville*, and never a *flic*. Although the stratagem was not original, your own admirable Poe having indeed set forth the theory of hiding a thing in a place so obvious that no one shall dream of looking for it there, our honest fellow overlooked it. But not *monsieur!* He it is who first proves to himself that Bastien is the thief, and then follows him outside and bravely forces him to give up his spoil.

"Then Mlle. Martine, who also has a pair of bright eyes, follows *monsieur* outside, and conceives a brilliant method of insuring the safe delivery of this so valuable jewel to her apartment. It succeeds; and later this same evening—at about midnight, to be exact—*monsieur* and his little new-found friend set forth to return the stone to its proper owner. A memorable evening, truly, but not yet come to its end. They do indeed return the stolen jewel, but then, with a mysterious packet which they certainly did not fetch with them, they leave in a—what shall I say?—a most agitated manner. Once outside they separate, and return to their respective homes. Have I been accurate, M. Barnes?"

"So much so," admitted Horace, "that I do not see what there is that I can possibly add. You know as much as I do—possibly more!"

The little man removed his thin black cigar, and bowed deeply.

"*Monsieur est trop flatteur,*" he protested. "He does my old wits too much honor. All that I have related was easy enough to learn, but I am still in the dark. What intrigues me, I confess it with humiliation, is this—by what means did the charming *mademoiselle* induce *monsieur* to collaborate with her in this singular adventure, seemingly so foreign to the ways of a studious professor?"

"Oh, that is easily explained. You see, that little box you mention contained things that don't belong to the residents at all. They are Martine's."

"You amuse yourself with me," complained Lapierre. "I beg of you to take pity on my bewilderment."

As completely as he could recall it, Horace related the story of Leonid Orlovski, the Russian ambassador, and the secret hiding place that he had shown to his niece, Martine.

"As a member of the detective bureau, you will probably recall his death in that house," he concluded.

For a long time Lapierre smoked in silence. When he spoke, his words seemed at first irrelevant.

"M. Barnes, were I to live my life over again, with free choice as to vocation, I would ask only to be a detective, and to live in Paris. The criminals of your great America are marked by a courage mounting to bravado. They choose high noon for their *coups*. Their ideas are vast, like those of your statesmen and financiers. They scorn little pickings. When they operate, it is against a noted jeweler on Fifth Avenue, with his shop thronged with armed watchmen, or against trust companies strong as fortresses. The British crook is celebrated for his tenacity. Once on the scent of game, he never lets up until he either succeeds or lands in prison. He is stubborn, like the bulldog; but our Apaches, *monsieur,* possess that beautiful imagination, that artistic conception of their—their chosen careers—that makes of crime a thing to engage the admiration of poets.

"Last night proves my contention. Behold the brilliant scheme which must instantly have flashed into the mind of Bastien—himself only a poor camp follower! And now the tale of *mademoiselle,* so perfect, so balanced, that *monsieur* accepts it without question! It is flawless, marked by all the dramatic touches of a great actress—nay, a novelist."

"You mean," Horace faltered, "that—it isn't true—all this about her uncle—"

Lapierre interrupted with a wave of his thin cigar.

"All great art is true," he said with simple nobility. "Do not the three immortal musketeers of our Dumas walk the streets of old Paris as truly as the courtiers of history do? Are not the heroes of the great Hugo as real to-day as when they stepped from his vivid pages? In this sense, the story of *mademoiselle* may be said to be true; but otherwise, it has no basis in homely fact. I, Lapierre, knew Leonid Orlovski well. He was of reverend years. What he may have been in his undisciplined youth, I know not. He presumably had his little indiscretions, for he was a man; but he was never connected in any way with the Rue Marbeuf. As ambassador for Russia, he was discreet and even austere. And in his day, the little Martine was a precocious *gamine* on the water front of Marseilles, the pet of seafaring men of all nations. Understand me, *monsieur*—she was, and I believe is, a virtuous girl. She was also wise. She might easily have become a prominent member of the society of the Rue Marbeuf, had she been otherwise. As it was, she laughed at the millionaires; but certainly she is an Apache."

Horace cried out in protest.

"But, M. Lapierre, it was she who assisted me in rescuing the stolen diamond from Bastien, and who later on insisted upon returning it to its owner!"

"*Parfaitement! Monsieur* is thinking of the Apaches as an organized society, with their rulers, and their inviolable laws. In truth, they are held together solely by their unanimous hostility to capitalism and established law. Their world reeks with petty jealousies. Here and there an Apache more daring or more intelligent than his fellows gains a following of sorts, and for a time. *Mademoiselle* grasped the chance to despoil the contemptible Bastien. And then, a more brilliant *coup* occurring to her, like a true sport she gave up the diamond to make a richer haul. I would give much to know just when this veracious fable entered her pretty head. Was it during your return with the Bohemians? Or, perhaps, while you lay briefly stunned by the fall downstairs?"

Horace could derive no pleasure from such speculations. He was still stunned by the realization that Martine was a crook, no whit better—to put it harshly — than Bastien himself; and that she—and he—were now in common case, collaborating thieves, and doubtless doomed to stand trial in the same dock!

Lapierre smiled faintly.

"*Monsieur* distresses himself," he said. "I assure him that the police of Paris have no designs upon him, or upon the delightful *enfant terrible* of whom he is thinking."

"But—but the box—the box that she sto—took from Mme. Pignotti?"

"That does not concern us. We have no official knowledge of any theft. No complaint has been entered, or will be entered. I must tell you that the Pignotti and her fellows belong to a dangerous band of propagandists, communists, and the like, who have given us much concern. They have been under constant espionage. It is possible that *monsieur,* in his hurried exit, yet found time to note one who bore a telegram, and who paused beside his bicycle—"

"That was you?"

The little man bowed, and reached into a coat pocket.

"And this," he said, producing a small sheet of blank paper, "this is the dispatch I carried."

"But what was in that box?"

Lapierre shrugged.

"I confess to a lively desire to know that myself; but, unfortunately, it has left the country. Valuables, no doubt, but especially secret papers which would be very informative as to the plans of the Pignotti gang. *Mademoiselle* gave them into other hands last night, to be smuggled out of France."

Horace pondered.

"I wonder how she knew about the hiding place!"

"One can but guess, *monsieur*. Let us assume that the Apaches had learned of it, probably through some inmate of the household. A month ago there was discharged a servant, an old *récidiviste* who has served many terms, and who is in touch with the criminal element of Paris. Martine learned of plans to rob the house; and when the chance to gain admission arose, she instantly decided to—how do you Americans say?—beat them to it."

"But even so, considering the risk, was not the solitaire more valuable than anything she could hope to find in the box?"

"Priceless, without doubt; but, for that very reason, most difficult to dispose of. It would have to be cut up into smaller stones, and sold at a fraction of its worth."

For some time they sat in silence, Horace sipping the last of his coffee, the little Frenchman placidly smoking. Suddenly a thought came to the American.

"You say the box has left the country. Where, then, is Martine?"

"That I cannot say," admitted Lapierre. "When I called this morning, she was packing her effects, including a cat and kitten in a wicker basket. She would not tell me her plans, though she frankly enlightened me as to many points. I will confess that it relieves me to know that she is leaving Paris, for she is a disturbing element. We always prefer to have such make their adieus, and save the expense and trouble of a court trial."

"But she sent me no message?"

Lapierre once more delved into a pocket. This time he produced a little scrap of paper many times folded, which he handed over to Horace.

"She had tacked this to her door, presuming that you would call. I offered to deliver it in person. *Monsieur* will have formed his own ideas of the methods of detectives, and it is probably useless for me to assure him that I have not read it, though I confess to a lively interest."

Horace clumsily unfolded the paper, and eagerly scanned its brief line. It contained but two words, in fact—"Polti's, Soho."

He handed the paper back to the detective, his eyes questioning.

"I can make nothing of it," he admitted. "Is it a cipher?"

Lapierre chuckled.

"Nothing so engaging, M. Barnes! Soho is a region of London not unlike our Montmartre, though, if I may be permitted to say so, lacking its verve and sparkle. It is, in short, the district of expatriates in the British capital; and there Polti conducts a little restaurant whose cuisine is well spoken of by our French exiles."

The eyes of the American lightened, his features relaxed.

"And is there anything to prevent me from leaving Paris, M. Lapierre—from leaving immediately?"

"No, *monsieur*. It is even what I should advise. For observe, my friend, the unhappy situation in which you have been placed. You are the subject of interest to the Prefecture—not, you will understand, of suspicion, but merely of interest. The Apaches do not love you. Leagued with *mademoiselle*, you have deprived them of a wonderful solitaire, and forestalled their intended raid upon Mme. Pignotti. Finally, her group will hold you in almost equal detestation. In short, were you to honor us by a further residence, we should feel it our duty to provide you with a strong bodyguard, night and day. Frankly, in Paris, your life is in great danger."

Lapierre rose, flicked the ash from his thin cigar, and prepared to make his adieu. After bowing formally, and then accepting Horace's proffered hand with simple friendliness, he paused ere turning away. He leaned confidentially over the table, his voice sinking to a whisper.

"Advice from an old man is seldom acceptable to a young one. Terse as is the little billet from *mademoiselle*, it is full of meaning. She has, I believe, no lover. *Monsieur* is young and personable. He has ingratiated himself with the little lady; and yet"—Lapierre closed his eyes—"and yet may I say, as a final word, that without in any way casting aspersions upon the establishment of M. Polti, there are in London many restaurants where the food is equally good and the surroundings more—how shall I say it?—more *tranquillizing?*"

With which, the agreeable M. Lapierre bowed once more, and sauntered from the room, his eyes bent thoughtfully upon the floor, the thin, black cigar hanging, unlighted, from his lips.

THE END

Suspicion

THE STORY OF A FALSE ACCUSATION

By Reita Lambert

RICHARD SELLS let himself into the dimly lighted hall of his Madison Avenue house, closed the heavy doors behind him, and stood for a moment in a listening attitude. Silence greeted him —silence hemmed in by the muffled rumble of the city, and by a blur of voices from the servants' quarters downstairs.

As he started up the broad staircase, the deep, musical voice of the library clock spoke. Midnight!

The house was an old one, with the mellow dignity of mid-Victorianism still lurking obstinately about the ornate moldings, the mahogany newel posts, and the marble mantels. With these Della's ingenuity had been powerless to cope—with these, and with Richard's own apartment on the second floor, though her polychromatic modernism flaunted itself from every nook and corner of the old house.

He found the amber wall lights in his sitting room glowing softly on the richly tooled volumes that lined the walls, and on the sedate old walnut furniture. With a repressed, methodical precision, he slipped into a dressing gown, lit a cigarette, and tapped lightly on his wife's door before opening it.

Here also a light was burning, striving to penetrate a china damsel's voluminous silk and lace petticoat, beneath which it was imprisoned. His glance swept the room, while a slow, sardonic smile twitched at his lips.

How easy it was to appraise and label Della, simply by entering her room! Originally one of those austere chambers of an equally austere era, only the severe white marble mantel now remained from that discreet day. Precise and immaculate, with its prim, pursed grate, it appeared to gaze out in horrified wonder upon the tufted and lurid accouterment of the room.

The dressing table, laden with all the subtle and mysterious accessories of a fashionable woman's toilet; the rococo Louis Quinze bedstead and chairs; the inlaid cigarette box; the impalpable gown and negligee draped across the bed, and the small, rose silk mules beneath; the faint odor of exotic scent that seemed to exude from all the gaudy trifles strewn so carelessly about the room—all this was Della.

As he looked, Richard was assailed by a guilty unease, the unease of a man who gazes upon a sleeping friend—sleeping, and unaware that he is being observed. For Della's gods played her false. Her tale was here, writ large and clear for prying eyes—the tale of petty vanities, feverish gayeties, and empty days crowded full but still ringing hollowly.

He sighed and eased himself into a chair. He was a tall man, with long feet and hands, and a lean, ascetic face prematurely rutted by weariness and frustration. He settled himself with the composure that was habitual to him—not so much composure, perhaps, as tenacious repression.

It was after two o'clock before his wife came, preceded by the cough of a fretful motor under the window and by the shrill of high, gay voices that echoed up and down the street. Then he heard the reverberation of the front door and light, quick footsteps along the hall.

" Well, for the love of Pete! I was all tuned up for a scream."

She paused in the doorway as he rose to his feet, with a small, bejeweled hand placed dramatically over her heart.

" I didn't intend to frighten you, my dear."

" Well, you know what some one once said about good intentions, Dicky!"

She was shrugging off her wrap as she came in. Now she flung it on the nearest

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chair, scuffed off her pumps, and strolled across to the cigarettes.

"Lord, I'm *dead!*" she said, and lit the cigarette nervously. "And that pathetic stuff the Osburnes serve in lieu of booze!"

She flung herself on the *chaise longue* with a deep sigh that brought a heavy cloud of smoke with it. She was slender, sinuous, glittering.

"Well, you haven't honored me thusly just to give me the once over, Dicky, have you? Of course I'm delighted, but—"

"No," he said slowly, and fumbled in the pocket of his dressing gown. "No, Della—I wanted to speak with you—alone. This appears to be the only time I can achieve that privilege."

She yawned elaborately.

"Won't it keep?"

"No."

"Br-r!"

She affected a shiver. Her husband's eyes rested speculatively upon her as he drew a crumpled newspaper clipping from his pocket.

Not for a moment did she discard her pose, her pretension of airy nonchalance, of coy archness. Many bangles, jingling on her wrists, caught and reflected the light from the floor lamp at her head. The diamonds on her slender fingers gave forth a prismatic iridescence. Fatigue had drained the natural color from her cheeks, and her rouge stood forth in vivid splashes. Though her position was one of weary relaxation, she did not suggest repose. Her figure seemed to be in a constant eruption of nervous, futile movement.

"I cut this out of the *Times* this morning," said Richard quietly, "after my attention had been drawn to it at the club."

She took the clipping, glanced at it, and handed it back to him with a sharp giggle.

"Well, what of it? I took my lecture and paid my fine. This darned country is so cluttered up with traffic rules and regulations, it's a wonder to me that half the people who drive cars aren't in jail! I've got most of the cops fixed, but this one was new. Anyway, I was only going about forty."

"Is that all you see in this clipping, Della?"

"What else is there to see?" she asked irritably. "I tell you I paid my fine."

His nostrils dilated, and the hand that held the clipping was trembling, but he spoke steadily enough.

"That's the least of it, Della. You were arrested for speeding—"

"I tell you I wasn't going more than forty, and these damned officious cops—"

"At two o'clock yesterday morning," continued her husband, "in the company of one of the most worthless and vicious men in New York."

"Oh, Hal's not so vicious when you know how to pet him!"

"His reputation is vicious."

"Oh, Lord, I get you, Dicky!"

"And it is printed here"—he tapped the clipping with a long forefinger—"for all the world to see—your name and his! Mrs. Richard Sells — Hal Dubose — two o'clock in the morning!"

"Well, what of it?"

Her voice was mutinous now.

"Can you ask?"

"I can, but that's only half of it, deary. Will you answer?"

"That is precisely why I am here. It isn't the first time you've broken into print along with some bounder."

"Well, I've got to have some one to play with, haven't I? God knows you're a total loss in that respect!"

"Then I must insist that you choose your playmates with a little more consideration for me—for my name."

She giggled delightedly.

"Light is breaking!" she cried. "Dicky's pride is hurted. He doesn't care what I do, so long as I don't break into print doing it! Oh, my dear, you are a fraud!"

He took a step toward her. For an instant fear wiped the insolent smile from her lips and arched the clipped brows over her cynical blue eyes. For an instant he towered over her, the flapping folds of his dressing gown accentuating his height, his lips drawn tightly over his clenched teeth.

"You're going a little too far, Della. Do you think it fair to abuse your position in this way? I've given you your head—"

"But you're keeping tight hold on the reins, I notice."

"You bear my name."

"Ah, that's it!" She blew a smoke ring expertly. "Now we're coming to the point! I'm a modest creature, you see, else I might think you jealous."

He smiled bitterly.

"I wish to God I were!"

"How silly, Dicky! To be jealous one must be maudlinly in love. To be in love is aging. It isn't worth the tears and wrinkles. Go along to bed, man, and I'll give your remarks due consideration."

He went back to the tufted pink chair and sank into it.

"I'm not going to bed, my dear, until I know what you're going to do."

"Do? Good gracious, how energetic you sound! I'm going to bed, of course, if you ever give me the chance."

"I don't mean *now,* Della, as you very well know. What are we going to do—about all this? We can't go on."

"The pronoun's plural. Speak for yourself, my good husband. What do you mean, we can't go on?"

Her levity, as always, seemed to make her impregnable, but he still held to his purpose.

"I, for one, can't go on like this," he said quietly. "Can you face it—endlessly? Is this your conception of marriage?"

"Why not?"

"Are you happy, Della?"

"S'pose so. I hadn't considered it."

He leaned toward her earnestly.

"You're not conscious of any lack? Are you, *can* you be, satisfied?"

"For the love of Pete, what is this—a revival meeting? First thing you know I'll be rising to testify!"

"Good God! Can't you be real? Are you a woman, or the empty shell you pretend to be? Are you devoid of all decent emotions?"

"Sounds like Edison's questionnaire," she said coolly. "Emotions are wearing. I don't keep 'em in my back yard. Aren't you ashamed to rant and tear like this all because of that damned cop and a newspaper clipping?"

"And can you see no farther back than that? Can it be possible that you are so blind? Do you think these ten miserable years have had nothing to do with it?" It seemed as if the pressure of his self-control would strangle him. "Is this sordid contention the paltry sum of marriage?"

"Well, what did you expect of marriage, dear man?"

"An occasional taste of happiness — a real home—a wife—children."

"Bourgeois ambitions, my dear, I must say! Besides, they went out with leg-of-mutton sleeves."

"Do you believe that, Della?"

"I know it! You're archaic, Dicky. What's that one about trying to reach a star? Don't you know by this time that it can't be done?" She gave him a hard, lazy smile. "Trouble with you, Dicky, you're trying to get more out of life than there is in it."

Her husband slumped back in his chair, while the smart truism edged its way into his consciousness.

"You're making a heap of misery for yourself, Dick," she said easily. "You don't expect me to sit by the fire and mend your socks while you read 'Little Dorrit' to me, do you?"

"No," he said quietly. "No, I don't expect that of you, Della—not any more—no more than you expect me to mingle with your—your—"

"My kennel of jazz hounds, eh?" supplied Della. "No, you're right. I leave you to moon and aspire by your lonesome. All I ask in return is that you should grant me the same latitude."

"And that is your idea of a happy marriage?" He held her gaze with narrowed, bitter eyes. "I should call the arrangement a vulgar farce."

"Aren't the two words synonymous, Dicky?" At his gesture of revulsion her lips curled. "Look here, did you come in here to-night to point the way to the nearest exit?"

"Do you see any good reasons for keeping on like this?"

"Oh, then you did!" she sneered. "This way out, eh? You *are* a chivalrous soul! But it isn't so simple as all that, Dicky. I know a thousand reasons for keeping on like this, as you put it." Her voice rose. "You are getting on my nerves, always clogging the works with your silly sob stuff just when they're running smoothly. Why can't you be a decent sport and take your medicine? Half the men in our set—"

"*Your* set!"

"Well, my set, then, would give their contraband liquor to be in your shoes, and to have a wife who never asks questions or complains! You know I don't butt in on your affairs, or pull any Billy Sunday stuff on you. If ours isn't an ideal marriage, I'd like to see one!" She leaned back and reached for another cigarette. "It suits me well enough."

"You prefer this to your freedom?"

"Wouldn't know what to do with my freedom, as you call it, if I got it. Besides"—she grinned maliciously—"I'd lose the prestige that accrues to a married lady. If you had sense enough to count your blessings, you'd settle down and enjoy yourself. You want marriage to be as it is in the goody movies—all love and kisses and baby clothes. Don't you see, that's why it *is* like that in the movies, because it's so novel?"

"You think so?"

"I know so! That kind of a marriage was dry rot. Why don't you jazz yourself up a bit? You're out of step, old chap!"

He got slowly to his feet.

"One would think you wanted to get rid of me in order to go and do it all over again," hazarded Della sagely. "You'd only pull another bonehead play if you did it. You'd find that nobody wants to waltz these days, Dicky. You have to learn to toddle, if you want to keep step with the gang."

"I have no such ambition," he said dully.

"Well, then, quit spoiling my party. What you need is a little lubrication, so why not try a high ball? I'll mix you one."

"No, thanks! If I were you, I should slow up on the high balls, Della. Your pace will kill you—high balls—speeding—"

"Don't you believe it," she replied. "Speed has nothing to do with it. A caterpillar may be slow, but he's likely to get stepped on, you know. I'd rather be at the wheel, going sixty, than be the poor devil in the middle of the road!"

Richard moved toward the door, and a chilly desolation went with him. He knew quite well that her assumption of indifference was the result of cool calculation. Behind that metallic cloak of cynicism she took refuge from his abortive protests.

He paused at the door, and turned back to her.

"About this Dubose bounder—will you be careful to see that his name is not linked publicly with yours again?"

"I'll do my darnedest, old thing. Nighty night!"

"I think I shall be leaving town in a day or so, Della."

"Leaving town? Where are you bound?"

"I'm not certain where I shall go."

"But it's nearly time to open the house at East Hampton. What shall I do about that?"

"Anything you please."

She sprang up and came toward him with repressed eagerness, her stockinged feet padding softly over the rugs, the gleaming silver of her gown trailing after her, her cigarette hanging from her limp, white fingers.

"Then I won't bother about it, if you're not going to come down. The place bores me insufferably, anyhow." Her eyes were very bright. "Fay Denny and some of her bunch are sailing for France in a week or so, Dicky. Suppose I join the parade?"

He nodded absently.

"Very well," he said. "I'll see that your account is kept in order."

"Oh, goody!" she rejoiced. "I've been dying of inanition lately. This darned town is as dull as a bad musical comedy. You're a duck!"

She flung her arms about his neck. He was conscious of her lips pressed fleetingly against his cheek, and of the agglomerate odors of a heady perfume and tobacco in his nostrils.

"Wish you luck, Dicky!"

Once in his room, back in the reassuring presence of his books and worn, substantial chairs, he stood aware, as always, that her blasé sophistries had left their noxious trail across his spirits.

"You're trying to get more out of life than there is in it, Dicky!"

It was a clever phrase—the sort of thing for which she had a diabolical aptitude; but was it true? Was all love either carnal or mercenary? Was virtue nothing more than discretion? Was marriage merely a convenient cloak to shield the baser passions and rob them of their social penalties?

Doubts assailed him, crowding in darkly upon his bleak lethargy; and at last they stung into sudden revolt the emaciated shadow of the idealism buried for a decade beneath the débris of his spiritual and marital wreckage.

II

THE village of Standish, named long ago in honor of the sturdy Miles, lies beneath its venerable elms, a short mile in from the Sound, in the reminiscent attitude of one whose memories are no puerile affairs. The position of the ancient houses, grouped about the village common like children squatting in a ring, adds to this appearance of brooding placidity. Scarcely one of these houses—spacious, many-windowed, invariably white—but has contributed its paragraph to American history.

The common itself, crisscrossed by four pebbled paths, had known the rumble of drums and the restless scuffle of horses' feet when the loyal citizens of Standish had responded to the call of their country. A weather-stained but purposeful young private, in Civil War regalia, stands sturdily at the intersection of the four paths, to commemorate one of these occasions. A sparsely lettered board, standing whitely beneath the trees, and richly embellished with gold stars, attests to the town's most recent sacrifice.

Richard Sells, making his way up from the little railroad station, responded to the valiant significance of these memorials with a thrill of appreciation; but if the town had enriched the nation's military archives, it wore its honors with modest stoicism. The slothful spell of a June morning overlay the streets and the common. Only the flowers appeared cognizant of Richard's avid gaze. They were everywhere—irregular beds of sweet William violating the emerald of sedate lawns; crimson ramblers rioting over trellises; nasturtiums peering from porch and window boxes.

Well off the State road, almost no motorists ever invaded the isolated little town, and the atmosphere was blessedly free of the stench and fret of cars. As he strolled beneath the drooping elms, something of the pervasive tranquillity communicated itself to Richard Sells.

At the lower end of the common, he found a street which was the " business section " of Standish. Here were the post office and the bank, a cluster of stores, and a battle-scarred building, once a church, now a " movie palace," if one could give credence to the sign above the door and to the high-sounding announcements of coming attractions.

Richard strolled into the corner drug store, invested in a pack of cigarettes, and favored the vendor with one of his weary smiles.

" The beach can't be far from here, if my map means what it seems to say," he remarked.

" It's straight down the road," vouchsafed the druggist pleasantly. " This way —I'll show you."

He ambled, a plump, pink, unhurried individual, to the screen door, and, leaning comfortably against the plate glass window, waved a blunt finger.

" Straight down, and then take the first road to the right. This one would take you plumb to the sluice, and you'd have to come back. The road leadin' to the right 'll take you to the beach."

Richard thanked him, and moved off down the road. Judging by the map from which he had selected Standish because of its evident inaccessibility, the village had appeared to overhang the Sound. Apparently his deductions had been a trifle optimistic, though the druggist's directions implied that the water could not be very far away.

His sense of peace grew as he walked. A sort of mellow retrospection seemed to emanate from the widely spaced houses and to hover beneath the gigantic elms, as if the old town realized that it was no longer part of the parade, but an outdated and slightly rheumatic spectator, tolerated because of its past glories. Once he had left the substantial prosperity of the village proper behind, the houses took on the down-at-heel air of crumbling gentility—the challenging gentility of a respectable spinster who wears her last season's hat with a rakish air that disarms sympathy.

Presently he came to the turn where the road led down to the beach. He could see the water, suave and green, with a few sporadic sails sown on its placid surface.

Now the country took on the flavor and the color of the sea. Fields of waving beach grass flanked the red road. The scattered houses were humble and weather-beaten, with trails of crushed oyster shells that served in lieu of paths. A crude sign before one of the houses announced that lobsters were for sale, and a trio of barefooted children romped around an upturned canoe in a yard where an old man sat roping a sail.

Unconsciously, Richard quickened his pace, his spirit lifting to meet the salt-laden breeze that swept up from the water. If Standish knew that a dash of rose water in the coffee was a smart gesture, or that the Frisco had succeeded the fox trot, its serenity was unimpaired by the knowledge. Richard grinned at the whimsy, and the grin gave birth to an amused chuckle that brought him to an abrupt pause.

He had left the humble cottages behind now, and stood before the last house on the road—a rambling white affair of Colonial vintage, with a wide lawn that sloped down to meet the reaches of beach grass beyond. It was a stolid, substantial house, with a square tower protruding stoutly from the roof, and girdled by an iron balcony; but it was not the house, nor the anomaly of the lookout, that held Richard's gaze.

What most attracted his attention was a plump white launch, at rest upon a couple of sturdy rollers, in the very middle of that precise lawn. There was something ludicrous in the picture—the stout little sea craft anchored in the midst of all this sedate circumspection, more than a hundred yards from the beach, snugly secure from the vagaries of the tides.

Richard moved impulsively across the grass, and read the cut brass letters athwart the stern of the launch, proclaiming that she was the Dorcas. The odor of fresh paint and turpentine clung to her, and her small deck showed clean stripes where a few boards had been wedged in beside the old. Hands in his pockets, Richard studied her with delighted curiosity, until a drawling voice rode into his reverie:

"Well, she ain't graceful, but she's pretty snug, eh?"

"Yes, I should say so—very," responded Richard promptly.

He found himself looking into a pair of small, twinkling blue eyes—so small, so deeply set in the leathery network about them, that they seemed to have been squeezed into their grooves by dint of the most persevering effort. Above the eyes were heavy tufts of ragged, beetling brows, in perfect affinity with the straggling mustache that bristled on the upper lip, and the visor of an ancient khaki cap sat jauntily over one ear.

Richard's swift appraisal guessed the stranger's age to be sixty. He was a massive figure of a man, weathered to a copper shade, with his face seamed and rutted by years, like the bark of an aged oak.

"I seen you come in to look her over," he announced with a chuckle; "but she ain't fer sale, mister."

"No? Isn't she seaworthy?" asked Richard politely.

"Oh, I guess she's seaworthy, all right, but I shouldn't wonder if she's plumb spoiled after all this coddlin'."

"She looks like a stout little bark," commented Richard critically. "I was wondering what she was doing up here, out of water."

"Jest a restin' her old bones. She needed it," said the old man, rocking gently from heel to toe as he spoke. "You should 'a' seen her when I brought her in!"

"Salvaged her, did you?"

"Salvaged her—yes, sir, with her starboard side staved in and her keel crushed. Oh, she was a sight, she was! I been workin' on her fer a couple o' years off and on."

"Going to launch her one of these days?"

The old man chuckled. The sound was like the suppressed roar of an amiable lion.

"I tell Dorcas—that's my daughter—I'm waitin' fer the tide." His shoulders shook at this pleasantry, and then his grin was succeeded by a portentous solemnity. "No lie, it did once—back in seventy-nine, that was. The water rose clean up here and flooded the cellar. I was a kid then. I recollect well paddlin' a dory around these very lawns."

"You don't say!" said Richard, with a polite show of wonder. "Tide rose that high, did it?"

"Yes, sir! I tell Dorcas what's happened once can happen agin, and one of these days we'll wake up to find the old girl afloat!" His voice rumbled off again on the wave of his mighty chuckle, which he cut short with a question. "Stranger in these parts, be ye?"

"Yes," replied Richard. "I'm just wandering around."

"Aim to stop awhile?"

"Yes, if I can find some one willing to take me in."

"There's a hotel uptown — sets a good table, they say. I ain't one to eat away from home myself, but they say the hotel sets a good table."

"But I'd rather not stay at a hotel," confided Richard, with a wistful glance toward the white house. "You see, I wanted to stay down here, nearer to the water. I thought I might prevail upon some family to take me in. I'm not particular, and I should be glad to pay their own price."

The old man's cordial loquacity was suddenly enveloped in a noncommittal silence. His weather-beaten face became a guileless mask of innocence.

"The hotel sets a good table," he repeated defensively.

"You don't happen to know of any one around here, do you, who would take a boarder for the summer?"

"No-o," said the old man thoughtfully. "Don't know's I do—no place *you'd* like to stay at, leastwise."

Richard took an uncertain step toward the road, but the drawling voice stopped him.

"Aim to stay the summer, do ye?"

"Yes," said Richard promptly, and with a faint hope in his eyes, though the question seemed to have been thrown out idly enough.

The old man merely pursed his lips and shrugged his stooped, lean shoulders, as if to indorse the idea as an excellent one.

"Fishing good around here?" asked Richard, as they strolled across the lawn side by side.

"Tolerable. Blackfish, and plenty of flounders — snapper blues, too, come August. You from the city?"

"New York."

"Well, now, I been there many a time. Never got far beyond the water front, though."

"You were a sailor?"

"I been everything from cabin boy to skipper. Fer twenty-eight years I was never in port fer more'n a month to one time."

"And now you've settled down on land," observed Richard, with a glance toward the thriving garden in the rear of the house.

"Jest like that lazy hulk back there." The old man jerked his head toward the plump launch. "I'm under petticoat orders, now. Dorcas—that's my daughter—she's skipper here."

Richard smiled. The noonday sun was pouring down upon his head, and the road and the fields of beach grass were in the lethargic torpor of breathless heat. He was conscious of a sharp reaction from his first buoyant enthusiasm—conscious that he was hungry, and that his lunch was still a problematical possibility.

"Well, if you ever do launch the Dorcas, I'll engage passage, if I'm around," he said genially. Then, with one of his rare, confident smiles: "I don't suppose you'd consider taking me in, would you? I can't imagine a more delightful spot than this. I can give you plenty of references, and I would be as little trouble as possible."

For a long moment the old man made no reply. With his hands buried deep in his khaki pockets, he received the suggestion with solemn deliberation. Richard's smile held something of the frustration and loneliness that lay behind him—something of boyish entreaty, which lifted the dislike of the well groomed and Malacca-burdened New Yorker that a place like Standish instinctively feels.

"I'm afeared that ain't possible, stranger," he temporized gruffly. "We don't take boarders here."

"I know that, but I thought you might make an exception in my case. You see there's something about this old house, and about you—" The smile spoke for him again. "Well, something drew me straight down here. I felt, when I first saw the place, as if I had come home."

The old man's deliberate stare refused to hold any longer. His eyes shifted, and his voice carried the husky portent of one who reveals a great secret.

"I'll tell you what, stranger, you can ask Dorcas—that's my daughter. She's skipper here, like I told you. I'm only mate, and"—he finished with a whisper—"she's a tartar, that girl. Come along! No harm askin', is there?"

He was leading the way up the gravel path that wound around the broad foundation of the old house to a small back porch canopied by a rich trellis of morning glories. Here he paused, while he fixed a solemn glance upon Richard—a glance blended of trepidation and fearful auguries. Then he lifted his voice.

"Dorcas! Be ye there, girl?"

He turned to Richard.

"Course we ain't never done it before. Not that I wouldn't be willin', but the girl, she's—"

"Yes, father! Do you want me?"

By this time Richard had been sufficiently overwhelmed by the old man's timid intercession on his account to experience a genuine sense of guilt at the sound of the girl's voice. Now he glanced up at the figure in the doorway, while astonishment succeeded his fear and swift appreciation tumbled after.

The screen door had swung outward, to disclose a young girl in the aperture. Such a girl, with carefully calculated effect, might grace the star rôle in some rural drama on Broadway, but she was the first of her type that Richard had ever seen in the flesh. She was slender, with the slenderness of immaturity, but she held herself with the erect poise of abundant health and vitality—shoulders squared, small feet planted firmly.

"Now, Dorcas!" began the old man. "Now, girl, here's a young man that wants—now lemme get through, and don't go flyin' into a rage—"

"Father!" Her puzzled frown flew from her father to Richard, who was awkwardly twisting the hat he had snatched off at her appearance. The old man's face was working convulsively, and from his throat came a mighty rumble. "Father! Now *what* are you laughing at? Father!"

He conquered his mirth with tremendous effort, and drew the back of his hand across his wet eyes.

"Why, at *him*, Dorcas!" He jerked his head toward the astounded Richard. "Did you see his face, girl? Did you see his face when you come out—how scared it was, and then—" He went off into another shaking fit. "I told him you were a regular tartar. He was plumb scared. Oh, Lordy!"

Crimson rode slowly up beneath the film of tan that coated the girl's cheeks, and she caught her nether lip between her teeth.

"Father, how *can* you? And before a stranger, too!"

"It's all right, Dorie. There, now, I'm sorry. I've said it, ain't I? I jest couldn't resist it, but I'm sorry."

His humility was abject. The girl's lips lifted in an indulgent smile as she turned to Richard.

"He's incorrigible," she said. "You must forgive him—we all have to. Father's jokes!"

She spread her fingers in helpless pantomime, as if the subject were far beyond words. Richard was quick to follow up his advantage.

"I had been pleading with your father to take me in as a sort of boarder. He said that yours was the deciding vote, but that he was willing."

"Now, father, aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she said, and turned to Richard. "Of course that's for father to decide, and it looks as if he had decided already—though we don't take boarders, you know."

"Now, Dorcas, girl, you know how you be, you—"

"Daddy, behave!"

The old man drooped lugubriously under the admonition, but his eyes were merry as they sought Richard's.

"Didn't I tell you she was skipper, friend? You see fer yourself how it is."

But Richard was smiling up at the girl.

"We've never done anything like that before," she was telling him; "though I've often thought it would be company for father if he had another man around."

"I should try to be as little trouble as possible," Richard assured her.

"I'm sure of that," she said gravely, and shifted her clear gaze to her father. "What do you say, dad?"

The old man rocked thoughtfully from heel to toe.

"It ain't up to me, girl. You're the one has to do the work. If you feel like doin' it, I'm willin' enough."

Her young face sobered as she looked at Richard again. Despite the sophistication of his well cut clothes, despite his cosmopolitan manner and pleasant, cultured voice, there was a wistfulness, an entreaty, in his slightly smiling mouth and eyes that neutralized his *savoir faire*. It was this same quality that had moved the old man out near the anchored Dorcas, and now the girl was aware of it. She was also aware of an odd response to it that was almost maternal. Her eyes smiled squarely into his.

"Well, at least there's no harm in trying it, is there? I think it might work out nicely. Daddy and I are alone here, and he gets frightfully bored with me sometimes." The old man growled his concurrence in that. "You understand that we can't make company of you, but if you are willing to fall in with our humble routine—we live very simply, you know."

"Which is exactly what I want," Richard broke in heartily. "If you'll accept me just as one of the family, I shall be no end grateful."

"You'll have to watch your p's and q's!" prophesied the old man, with a chuckle.

"Now, father!" chided his daughter, and to Richard she said pleasantly: "Will you come in? I'm just ready to put dinner on the table."

They filed into the kitchen—a great square room with braided rugs on the floor, a range set in a wide old chimney of red brick, and muslin sash curtains at the windows. The same air of tranquillity that he had felt in the village pervaded the big room.

"I left my bags up at the station," he announced.

"Shall we give him the south room, Dorcas girl?"

"The east room will be cooler, dad."

"But I thought mebbe he'd like the view from the south windows."

Richard broke in half timidly.

"I've been wondering, since I'm lucky enough to be here, whether the room in the tower is in use," he suggested. "I noticed it from the road. There must be a view from those windows."

"Lordy, boy, that room's like to be as hot as Tophet, come real warm weather!"

"In that case I could carry a blanket out on the balcony," said Richard, with an eager undercurrent in his voice. "That lookout tower of yours has been wooing me ever since I first caught sight of it."

"I'm really afraid you wouldn't be comfortable up there," ventured the girl thoughtfully.

"It ain't been used in a dog's age," appended the old man.

This duet of deprecation went on for several moments, while the smiling but determined Richard stood his ground.

"Well," said the girl, finally, "there's a bed up there, and I can get Rose Ruby to clean it up this afternoon. Why not take him up to look at it, dad?"

The old man appealed to Richard.

"You see how 'tis! You see who's skipper, don't you? Come along—we'll take a look, anyway."

Richard followed him through a cool, spacious hall, up two flights of broad stairs, and then up a third flight shut off from the main body of the house by a door, and shooting up, narrow and almost perpendicular, into a square, low-ceilinged room. Windows, closely shuttered now, looked out from all four walls, and the must and dust of years was in the stale air.

"Wait till I open a blind, so as we can see a thing or two."

The old man fumbled for the nearest window. One after another he flung them open, and spread the blinds wide, while Richard stood near the door watching the old room lift itself from the shroud of darkness that had enveloped it.

"There, now, and here's a door out to the balcony. Like as not the bed's hard as nails."

But Richard had stepped through the narrow doorway. For a dumb, crowded moment he stood with his hand on the corroded iron rail. Below him the yellow road he had traveled fell away in a gentle slope from the main highway to the water's edge, burning its purposeful way past the squatting fishermen's cottages as if impatient of their stoic quiescence. To the south lay the Sound, embellished by an irregular fringe of beach that traced the shore to the east and west. Four miles out Shipton Island light reared itself like an admonishing finger over the vicious shoals on which it was built.

"Them islands athwart the light there—Thimble Islands, we call 'em. They're perilous mean fer a skipper that don't know these waters."

"Thimble Islands!" repeated Richard absently, for the beauty of the scene stretching away beneath him had left him without words.

"Ye can see nigh to New London with the glasses," said the old man. "That's the way my mother kept her eagle eye on my father, long after he'd got beyond reach of her voice!"

His voice drawled on, the words blurring into a good-natured drone that swelled suddenly into an announcement.

"Stayton — Peter Stayton — that's my name, friend, same as my grandfather who built this house. You've heard of him, mebbe — him that built the fust salmon wheel in New England, and spliced it onto his sloop, the old Dorcas."

Richard's eyes met the bright blue gaze that gimleted into his own. He held out his hand.

"You'll overlook my absent-mindedness, won't you? I should have introduced myself long before this." He stopped abruptly, his glance still held by those expectant blue eyes, and he drew a deep breath before he spoke again. "Mr. Stayton, I have as much reason to be proud of the name I bear as you have; but just at present, for various reasons—none of them vicious, I assure you—I should like to discard it. Understand, you don't have to agree to this. I can furnish you with all the facts you want; but—will you take me on faith, my friend, as Smith or Brown or Jones? It's nothing more nor less than a whim, but I should appreciate it if you felt you could humor me."

Old Peter Stayton rocked gently from heel to toe—his invariable habit when he was debating on weighty matters; but the eyes that impaled Richard's did not withdraw their steady gaze.

"I've come out here to rest," Richard went on gravely. "I've been part of the mad scramble in town for more than ten years, and now that I've shaken all that off"—he smiled wanly—"well, it seems to me that if I drag an intrinsic part of myself into my retreat here, some of the sediment of the city is bound to adhere to it. I'd like to come into your household as you might once have picked me up at sea—stripped."

"H-m!" grunted the old man judicially. "Come out here to rest up, have ye?"

"Yes."

"What be ye, in the city?"

"A banker," said Richard, lumping his manifold interests into an understandable word.

"Rich?"

The word was put soberly enough, and Richard considered it with due gravity.

"I suppose you would call me rich—yes."

"You say you got papers and things with you?"

"In my bags at the station."

"We-ell," drawled Peter, "I've lived nigh on to sixty years, and I ain't never been took in yet. I've yet to be deceived by a face, and I liked yourn the fust minute I clapped eyes on it." He held out his hand solemnly, but deep in his twinkling eyes the light of a long quiescent gambling spirit gleamed. "I'll take ye on your own terms, young feller. Brown, ye say, or Jones, maybe? Brown comes easier to say. Brown it 'll be, hey?"

Richard's hand was once more taken into the horny grip of his host. As they pumped arms genially, he had the sense of a lifting weight—a sense of floating free from the cluttered débris of his past.

III

The voice of the girl followed him up to those buoyant heights, rising clear and authoritative from the stair well.

"Dinner's ready! Don't dally until it gets cold, father!"

Peter's grin vanished beneath his straggling mustache.

"Brown, remember," he said portentously. "Better not let on to Dorcas that it ain't your real name. No tellin' how she'd take it. She's a tartar, that girl o' mine!"

Richard came to know, in time, that this was the old man's most precious pleasantry—his assumption of a grievance against his daughter's acerbic characteristics. But now he followed the massive old figure downstairs, his responsive smile reflecting Peter's own trepidation.

The kitchen table was laid for three, and the savory odor of broiling fish permeated the room. The girl's light frock was covered by a checked apron, her cheeks were flushed, and little beads of perspiration sprinkled her nose and forehead. She smiled up at Richard, in the act of setting a covered vegetable dish on the table.

"Did the tower room come up to your expectations?"

"It surpassed them," he said. "I'm only afraid you'll never be able to get me out of it!"

Peter broke in with a significant cough behind his hand.

"Dorcas, this is Mr. Brown. That's his name—Brown." His eyelid dropped with elaborate cunning over his eye. "Kin, likely, to old Ebenezer Brown that was settled up New London way back in eighty-six, eh?"

Richard moved hurriedly toward the girl, his lips twitching.

"Miss Stayton, this is an occasion for rejoicing with me."

She gave him her hand, after brushing it lightly against her apron, and returned his grip with her warm, firm clasp.

"I hope you will like it here," she said primly, and broke into a sudden laugh. "As master of ceremonies, father is marvelous, don't you think?"

Her laugh removed the last vestige of restraint, and they seated themselves at the table amid a gay babble of small talk.

"Swordfish!" remarked Peter with gusto, and helped Richard with lavish bounty.

There was talk of fish, then, and of oyster spawn, and finally of gardens. The girl reminded her father that the tomato bugs were swarming again. At this announcement, Peter threw a triumphant glance at Richard.

"No rest fer the wicked, Mr. Brown. That's just the way she keeps after me!"

The girl smiled.

"He pretends it's a chore," she explained, "but I can't keep him out of the garden. I tell him he'll kill the plants with kindness."

It proved to be a jovial dinner, the first of the sort that Richard had ever participated in, with the heaped dishes on the table, and the coffee bubbling in an old granite pot on the range a dozen feet away. It was decided that young Ross Leete should be sent for the bags and trunk at the station, and bring them down in a hired jitney. Rose Ruby—who, it appeared, was servant in general to the entire village—would be delegated to put the tower room in order.

Shot through all this inconsequential small talk, weaving it into an exquisite symphony, was the almost tangible bond of sympathy between the girl and her father. Watching them, listening to their disarming exchange of crisp repartee, it occurred to Richard that he was in the presence of a human relationship almost holy in its perfection. He saw through the carefully preserved fiction of old Peter's constant mutiny—saw that behind this apparent rebellion against petticoat rule the old man cherished a tremendous affection for his "tartar" daughter.

His bags came that afternoon, marshaled by a gangling boy, and the indispensable Rose Ruby appeared soon after. Richard was squatting contentedly on his trunk when she came into the room—a tattered scarecrow of an old woman, with a hooked nose that threatened her chin when she grinned at him, displaying an irregular series of pointed yellow teeth.

She surveyed Richard from the doorway, leaning, like some outlandish harridan, on her broom, before she favored him with one of her devastating smiles.

"Howdy? Pete says you aim to stop here awhile."

"Yes," said Richard. "Not a bad place to stop, is it?" he added pleasantly.

She cackled knowingly.

"Oh, I know better places—more lively. I wuz to Coney Island wunst."

"No! And how did you like it?"

"It was grand!" She rolled her eyes in a reminiscent transport. "All them lights and bands! You ever been to Coney Island?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Ain't it grand, now?" She sobered. "Be you a painter?"

"No—oh, no," he assured her.

"There was one here wunst," she confided. "He used to go down on the beach an' paint when there wasn't nothin' *there* to paint." She cackled again at the memory. "I like to split my sides laughin' at that painter."

Richard drifted out to the balcony, in self-defense. He had still to appraise Rose Ruby at her proper worth. As village quidnunc, the old woman was possessed of a shrewd sagacity and rich suspicion, and these qualities imbued her most prosaic days with plenty of color.

By evening the tower room was clean and comfortable. Dorcas herself spread the bed with immaculate sheets smelling faintly of cedar, and tucked in the sides with brisk, deft movements. A chest of dull old mahogany drawers held his water pitcher and bowl. A cabriolet, slightly battered, but not violated by paint or polish, braided rugs on the floor, a shelf for his books—these constituted the other furnishings of the room.

Moving awkwardly about, his eyes ever wandering to the fascinations of the view beyond his windows, Richard protested at the girl's turning housemaid for him.

"But Rose Ruby couldn't make up a bed that would stay put until morning," she told him, smiling fleetingly up at him. "She's very much impressed since she knows you've been to Coney Island."

They both laughed at this.

"You see, she went there on her wedding trip, I don't know *how* long ago."

"And you?" asked Richard amusedly. "Have you ever been to Coney?"

"Never," she admitted, and her eyes danced; "but I've seen the Woolworth Building and Grant's Tomb."

"Ah, you have been to New York!"

"As a graduation present from dad," she said. "I had a dreadful time keeping him away from the water front!"

There was a freshness of appeal about her which broke through the bulwark of silence that Richard had intended to preserve as self-protection. He found himself drawing her out, while he reveled in the abundant vigor of her slender figure and capable little hands. She had, it appeared, attended normal school in New Haven, with a view to teaching, but had left at the end of her sophomore year.

"Father needed me," was her simple explanation of that.

"He's been retired for some time?"

"Since I was born — and my mother died."

The brief history explained the girl's correct vocabulary. Richard marveled at her apparent contentment—marveled, too, at the refractory tendrils of brown hair that clung in little curls to her damp forehead.

"We'll have supper at six," she told him, with a cursory glance of satisfaction about the room. "I expect it seems odd to you, having dinner in the middle of the day; but we prefer it, because it gets the heaviest work disposed of early."

That night Richard dragged the Queen Anne chair out on the balcony, lit a cigarette, and relaxed. There was no moon, but the brilliant stars were doing their best to make up for this deprivation. They seemed to hang just over the top of the superannuated horse chestnut trees that sentineled the lawn. The sea lay beyond, a black, vast void, with the light from Shipton Island sending its staccato wink coquettishly forth to delight passing liners. Over all lay the faint splash and suck of water and the plaintive chorus of frog and kingfisher.

Richard had a curious sense of having floated off into some stellar space, of gazing back on the feverish futilities of the world with sudden penetration. His thoughts flew to Della, who at the moment was somewhere on that broad expanse of water, bound for Paris and its hectic gayeties. She would be dancing now, probably, with a cigarette hanging from her pale fingers, and the illicit gleam of a smuggled flask in her eyes.

The picture of her as she had been ten years before sketched itself beside this one. A little rose and gold butterfly she had been, with tiny feet and hands that were never still. She had charmed him from a staid and bookish existence, had left irrevocably the shimmering pollen of her butterfly wings on his staid and bookish old house. So busy—so futile—so empty!

How amused she would be at this, his desperate gesture of emancipation — at these simple country people who had taken him in—at the girl in her gingham and the old man with his halting rhetoric and childish posing. "Hicks," she would call them.

But he had left all that behind him. It was one with the roar of the Elevated and the chug of taxis and the raucous dissonance of jazz. He had come out here to forget.

The future? Richard Brown had no future. The present hour—this was his!

IV

WITH a swift adaptability born of his eagerness, Richard fell in with the pleasant, uneventful routine of the Stayton household. It was a routine of homely duties about the house and garden—duties which occasionally extended to the beach as well.

Half a mile offshore, a dozen red and white floats marked the presence of old Peter's lobster crates. With a pair of high boots and khaki trousers, bought at the general store to replace the knickers he had brought, Richard often accompanied his host in the dirty, flat-bottomed rowboat to haul in the lobsters. He learned to haul in and lift out the struggling green captives, to toss in a new supply of hermits, and to comment judicially on the size of the haul.

Occasionally, too, they went off fishing, anchoring near the shoals and drop-lining for blackfish and flounder. These they carried proudly home to Dorcas, who would compliment them on their skill, to the tune of Peter's aggrieved complaint that a man of his years and experience should stoop to such a senile pastime.

"Anglin' like a half-wit over the side of a boat!" he would grumble, while his little, deep-set eyes danced and his horny fingers jerked self-consciously at the ends of his mustache.

It was a delightful game that the girl and her father played. Richard's amusement was a blend of envy for their contentment and tenderness toward the transparency of their pretended disagreements.

Then there were the evenings when they would walk to the village for the evening mail—which consisted of the New York paper that Dorcas insisted upon subscribing for. Occasionally, in the stiffly proper parlor, with its broad stretch of patterned carpet, its plush lambrequins and straight-backed chairs and albums, Dorcas would open the little rosewood organ and drag her father, reluctant, protesting, but immensely pleased, to the plush-covered stool.

"Now, father—no hymns!" she would admonish. "Let's have 'Old Uncle Ned,' or 'Sarah's Young Man.'"

"Listen to her!" Peter would command Richard. "A pagan that girl is—that's what!"

"No more than yourself, dad. Come on, we're waiting!" And to Richard: "Wait until you hear father play! All bass and no treble!"

With a malicious grin, the old man would spread his gnarled, awkward fingers and roar out the first verse of some familiar old hymn until the house reverberated to the din.

These musical orgies generally greased the old man's loquacity. Politics, the sea, religion—all were reduced with equal ease to the terms of his own simple tenets. He was amusingly original on the subject of God and the various ecclesiastical sects and denominations.

"I ain't a church man. I don't see that religion's any better wrapped up in a sermon than in the Bible. Why should I listen to a preacher, when I can read my Bible to home, and be comfortable? A man can't go far wrong when he's got a Bible and knows the Ten Commandments. I take my religion like I take calomel—when I feel the need of it."

To all this homely routine Dorcas Stayton added a dash and tang of color—the dash and tang of vibrant youth and beauty and unvarying sweetness of temper; but Richard had been in Standish some three weeks before he became acquainted with the girl as an entity, so closely had she associated herself in his mind with the house, the dinner table, and old Peter.

He had wandered vaguely around a curve in the beach on an afternoon in July, when he came upon a narrow salt inlet that wound into the swamps of beach grass. He followed its course aimlessly until he espied a bright checked frock and saw the girl shoving off a small round-bottomed skiff.

"Ahoy, Miss Stayton!" he called.

"Ahoy there, Mr. Brown!" she returned merrily.

He paused beside the boat, which was almost hidden by the tall grass.

"This looks very furtive to me," he chided. "Are you going down to the sea in ships?"

"I do, often," she told him, smiling up from beneath the crude farmer's hat that she had tied, for safety's sake, beneath her chin.

"Do you take passengers?"

"Only useful passengers," she said. "If you'll take the rudder, you may come for a cruise."

He promptly bounded into the boat.

"No sooner said than done! But why not let me row?"

"Because that's my job," she told him. "It keeps me fit, and I love to row."

She settled herself amidships and pushed off with an oar.

"This little skiff is my pet," she confided. "Dad had it made for me. Isn't it a dear?"

Richard nodded. His eyes were following the grace and skill with which she dipped and pulled at her oars. She seemed utterly devoid of self-consciousness or coquetry, though her self-reliance had cost her none of her inherent femininity. Here were no languishing glances, no calculated lift of lips or arching of brows. Her widely spaced gray eyes met his evenly, and her smile was rare and genuine enough to be ineffably enchanting when it came.

"Steer for the little rock island due south," she commanded. In the next breath she added: "You're looking much fitter, Mr. Brown."

"I hadn't known that I wasn't looking fit," he rejoined lazily.

"You looked—well"—she paused for the right word—"shopworn when you came. You know what I mean, perhaps—so many city people look that way. Their eyes get sort of blurred, like a mirror when it's handled too much."

"I shouldn't wonder if we do," he agreed, a little startled by the young girl's unexpected insight. "In the city, one gets the bloom rubbed off in the shuffle."

"That's it," she said brightly, and added, with a smile: "Well, yours is coming back. Standish, they say, is a wonderful beauty restorer."

Their laughter mingled at that.

"You like Standish?" he asked.

"Oh, I love it!" she cried.

"You don't long, as they say most country-bred girls do, for the bright lights of the city?"

She shook her head gravely.

"I'm afraid of them—the lights," she confessed. "It seems to me that the brighter they are, the more they hide. I'm afraid of the things they hide!"

Richard found himself suddenly confronted by a very attractive anomaly. Here was a girl who slipped into none of the familiar niches occupied by the types he knew. His curiosity stirred. Was her serenity evidence of stupidity? Or, young as she was, had she bridged the perplexities of life, and thus achieved her high place of content?

He found himself plumbing the depths of her singularly clear and methodical young mind. In return, he told her about himself—about the part of his life that he could recall with happiness—about his boyhood, and his father's farm, and the old house on Madison Avenue.

It was a lazy afternoon, an ideal setting for confidences. The little skiff cut sturdily through the gentle swell as they rounded the little island of washed rock.

"I often come out here and read, or just sit and think," she told him. "It's ever so much bigger at low tide."

He looked at the protruding rock with new interest, and could picture Dorcas sitting there, the one vivid patch of color in all this gray expanse of water.

"You must bring me out some time when the tide is low," he suggested, and she promised.

"We can't come when it's dead low, or we should have trouble getting ashore again," she told him.

They rowed slowly back, chatting lazily. Richard listened to her quaint observations with growing eagerness. She was so unaffected, so free of self-conceit or rhetorical cant; yet he had proved that she could think and could talk. For some reason the discovery elated him. Her beauty, he reflected—for he had just discovered that she was beautiful—would have been enough; but it seemed that she was even more richly endowed.

The sun was beginning to droop sleepily toward the western horizon when they tied the boat and made their way over the fields toward the white house. As they walked, Richard was conscious of the girl's graceful, unmincing stride, and of the luminous vitality that seemed to emanate from her in a sort of aura.

"Dad must have gone to town," she said, when they reached the back door and saw no signs of the familiar figure in the garden or pottering about the girl's namesake, the captive boat. She laughed mischievously. "I'll hurry supper and pretend he's late. Then *he* can pretend he's being abused!"

"Then let me help," pleaded Richard, catching her playful spirit.

"All right!" she agreed, and slipped her arms into an enveloping apron. "Let's hurry—it 'll be fun to hear him!"

"What can I do?"

"Do you really want to help?"

"I insist."

"Well, then"—she was looking at his tweeds—"you must have an apron, too. Then you may set the table."

"Good!"

She unearthed a second apron from a drawer, and turned to him.

"Now, turn around!"

He obeyed.

"Lift up your arms!"

He did so. Her firm, slender young arms encircled him for an instant as she drew the apron under his armpits. Then he felt her tying it securely between his shoulder blades.

Her touch, light and inconsequential as it was, invested him with an odd exhilaration. He was aware of a swift throb in his throat. It was as if some intangible mist had lifted from the world, leaving it crystal clear and luminous.

"There!" she said.

He whirled on her. They stood for a moment, smiling into each other's eyes, before the girl moved off in her matter-of-fact way, still laughing at Richard over her shoulder.

"The knives and forks are in the table drawer. The plates are in the pantry—the supper plates, not the big ones. Let's hurry!"

"You bet!"

He snatched open the table drawer, conquering an amazing impulse to click his heels together. The smile remained on his lips. Here they were, knives and forks and shining spoons. *How* they shone! But then everything was shining and beautiful. Why, he must have been ill not to have seen all this beauty before — not to have *felt* it as he was feeling it now!

"Better not be too rambunctious, or you'll break those plates," she warned, laughing across at him from the stove.

"Let's!" he cried. "Let's break one—just one, to celebrate!"

She gave him a shocked frown.

"To celebrate what?" she asked incredulously. "How fearfully extravagant! To celebrate what?"

"Oh—why, just to celebrate," he said, and lowered the plate with a sheepish grin to its place on the table.

What was he saying? Why should he celebrate? He fumbled about in his mind for the answer. He found it, and took a few silent dance steps on the rug.

He had it! He was happy—that was it, happy! He didn't know why, but he was happy!

V

Richard was amazed and a little awed, on awaking the following morning, to find that his inexplicable ecstasy still held. He had fought sleep far into the night, with the childish fear that he would wake to find that exquisite rapture gone, like *Aladdin's* castle; but his sleep had been dreamless, and he woke to a world bathed in a wondrous light.

He bounded out of bed and strode to the balcony, where he stood in his pyjamas, drinking in the salt air and feasting his eyes on the green beauty spread out beneath him.

The sound of a dozen motor boats, starting out from the sluice to explore lobster pots, reached him faintly. What vigorous beauty there was in the sound! He felt the sudden urge to speak. It was almost as if he were being called upon, like some penitent at a revival meeting, to testify to the miracle that had happened to him. He was happy!

Leaping down the stairs to his breakfast, he found Dorcas busy making toast and old Peter squatting on the doorstep, whittling a piece of wood.

"Good morning! And what a morning!" he cried.

The girl gave him one of her swift, buoyant smiles. Her father turned lazily.

"No breakfast yet, mate! That girl's slow as molasses. She does it jest to pester me, I know!"

"Now, dad, you hush, or you'll get no breakfast," she commanded.

"You see!" He laid his plight before the smiling Richard. "You see what a daughter she is to me!"

"I see that you're a fraud, Peter Stayton," he said, beaming down cheerfully upon the squat figure. "That's what *you* are—a fraud!"

The old man's eyes twinkled.

"You're lookin' perk as a perker, this morning, mate!"

"And feeling perk," added Richard. "Do we haul lobsters to-day?"

"Oh, I s'pose so, though my back's gone back on me."

When Peter was not complaining of his daughter's lack of filial affection, he was grumbling about his back. With a hand resting plaintively across his spine, he would recount the painful and lasting injury he had suffered in a fall from the rigging, more than twenty years before.

"I come down smack on my heels, like this, and a pain shot up to here." He designated the exact spot. "You'd 'a' thought it would 'a' hurt my heels, wouldn't ye? But no, sir—it settled in my back, that pain did, and now in wet weather—"

"But it's sunny this morning, dad! Come along and dish up!"

"The girl's got no sense o' sympathy," he observed with the greatest relish. "She's cold and heartless. She knows it's rowin' that makes it hurt wuss."

"Then why don't you buy a put-put for your boat, daddy?"

"Think I was made o' money, to hear her, wouldn't ye?"

But he was in the highest good humor at the breakfast table, and was careful to serve the choicest strips of bacon and the neatest egg to his daughter.

Richard had learned to love the old fisherman, and Peter Stayton's buried little blue eyes dwelt with genuine affection upon the younger man.

"If I'd had a son, I shouldn't 'a' minded if he'd been purty much like you, matey," he was wont to say on those rare occasions when he forgot that he was a fierce old fellow. "But the Lord saw I needed chastenin', and he sent a petticoat to do it," he would wind up, with a lugubrious sigh.

Through the following days Richard's happiness stayed with him, though he kept a doubtful vigilance over it, fearful of its leaving him, fearful of being plunged back into the dark morass of his weary doubts and bitter loneliness. Dorcas Stayton companioned him now on many of his explorations, and they drifted together imperceptibly, fishing lazily from the skiff, taking long walks over the rolling inland country, or sitting on the gunwale of the captive launch, while old Peter fussed and fumed in her hold. They had nicknamed the old boat "the lawn goer," despite Peter's bitter protestations that they were being irreverent.

Summer matured richly. The garden yielded yellow squash, crisp string beans, and an abundance of peas. Richard learned to shell these nicely, sitting on the doorstep, with the girl's encouraging voice urging him on to magnificent effort. The spacious mahogany offices on Broad Street, the old Madison Avenue house, the summer place at East Hampton, his cars, his clubs, and Della — even Della — had assumed the vague unreality of a dream. Only this was real, Standish and old Peter and the girl and the hook-nosed, shrewish Rose Ruby. These were real!

"Jake Stout was tellin' me to-day that Tad Bowen, over to New London, has an engine he wants to sell," Peter remarked one evening. "Seems some city feller bought it off Tad, and then traded it back fer somethin' else."

"Why don't you go up and look at it, daddy?" urged Dorcas, catching the undercurrent of desire in her father's voice. "It might do for your boat."

"Listen to her! How do you know if it might do, girl? And Tad Bowen's that near, I never got a bargain off him in my life."

The girl was undeceived. She flashed a knowing smile at Richard.

"You know you want it, dad!"

"Nothin' o' the sort!" protested Peter indignantly.

"And you know you're dying to get up to New London and tell all those old reprobates around the water front what a fine skipper you used to be."

"Now ain't that like a woman?" demanded Peter disgustedly. "I ain't been up to New London in a dog's age, and you know it!"

"About time you went, crosspatch!"

"And you call my friends reprobates! Jest fer that I don't stir a step; and what with my back and all, you can jest take over the rowin' yourself, young woman!"

"All right, dear. You'd only go up there and drink a lot of Tad Bowen's hard cider, and come back with a headache," observed Dorcas casually.

"What?" roared Peter. "Ye impudent little hussy! Accuse me of gettin' drunk, will ye?"

"I didn't say 'drunk,' daddy," corrected the girl innocently.

"No, ye didn't *say* it, but I know what's behind them eyes of yourn! Let me tell ye right now"—he waved his heavy forefinger at her in a beautiful imitation of uncontrollable rage—"I'm a goin' up to New London fer that engine! Now, we'll see who's cap'n here!"

Old Peter lapsed into a mumbling basso of self-pity and disgust. The girl's lips were twitching, and her eyes were merry. Both participants in this perfectly transparent skirmish had achieved their objectives, and the family tradition had been nicely preserved.

VI

After dinner, the following day, Peter doffed his disreputable cap, donned a baggy suit of gray, shaved carefully, and brushed the stubborn bristles of his thin hair wetly against his forehead. Scattering homilies and protestations in his wake, he departed for the "depot" and New London.

Rose Ruby had been called in for the emergency. The old woman was to sleep in the room next to Dorcas, in case Peter should happen not to get back that night.

"Of course," Dorcas told Richard, as they watched the old man off down the hot, yellow road, "he won't be back until tomorrow morning. He knows it, and he knows that I know it, but he always pretends it's an accident, and writes a letter of complaint to the railroad about the poor train service."

"The dear old infant!" The tenderness in Richard's eyes matched the girl's. "He's a wonderful old scout!"

"He's a saint," amended the girl softly.

Richard helped to prepare supper that evening, peeling apples for sauce, and standing by admirably while Dorcas made biscuits. It seemed to him that daily he found more to admire in this vivid young creature, with her simple beauty and her immense funds of reserve. His thin lips were forever lifted in a smile these days. His tall, lean figure had taken on the sturdy vitality of the native fisherman. His long hands were brown and slightly roughened.

Supper was late because, as Dorcas complained mischievously, "they had dawdled." There was cold lobster, and the biscuits were miraculously light. The chocolate cake was slathered thick with rich frosting, and the apple sauce was pleasantly tart as contrast.

"These biscuits are the work of an artist!" enthused Richard. "I'm beginning to think you are that—an artist!"

She shrugged her slender shoulders, but her eyes glowed with pleasure.

"I've been making biscuits since I was fourteen," she told him.

Richard was suddenly conscious of their complete aloneness. It was the first time they had sat down to a meal without old Peter, and there was enchantment in it. They faced each other across the table, their glances meeting merrily over each mouthful. Richard praised the apple sauce enthusiastically, and was promptly rebuked, since he had made it himself. He was subdued by this reminder, and licked a smudge of frosting from his finger tips.

"Can't afford to lose a crumb of it," he declared.

They laughed at his greed. Richard had never felt so full of laughter.

"By Jove," he cried, "I have an idea! Suppose you take me out in the skiff to see your own private island! We can watch the sunset on the water, too."

" We'll have to hurry, if we want to see the sunset," she said. " Shall we leave the dishes?"

" Yes, and I'll dry them when we come home."

" I'll do 'em, Dorcas."

It was Rose Ruby from the doorway. The grotesque, bent figure seemed for a moment to have shut out the evening glow behind her. Her nose came down to meet her chin over her yellow smile, and her bright little eyes regarded them with a sort of baleful relish.

" Oh, it's you, Rose Ruby! Well, come along in—you're just in time." Rose Ruby sidled into the room. " There's some coffee on the stove, if you haven't had your supper, and plenty of biscuits."

Richard felt a distinct sense of relief when they started down the path.

" She's an ugly old customer, that Rose Ruby of yours."

" Oh, she's a good old thing," defended Dorcas. " Of course, she can't help the way she looks."

Which disposed of Rose Ruby. Through the mellow glow of approaching twilight they trudged down the road to the beach. The tide was full, and the dainty little skiff was well afloat among the beach grass.

" I'm going to row to-night, while you pretend you're a lady of leisure," announced Richard, and Dorcas settled herself with mock docility in the stern. He pulled off. " Make for your rock island, matey!"

" Right-o, cap'n!"

The beach fell away from them. Presently they were making their way across a perfectly flat world—a shimmering, iridescent world, with a bending canopy of fading blue, puffed here and there by a bit of floating swan's-down. In the west, the half closed eye of the sun peered redly across at them.

" I know what heaven is like, now!" observed Richard gravely.

" I never have liked the idea of a gold and silver heaven," contributed Dorcas.

" Too much polishing to keep it bright," appended Richard, and their laughter pealed forth as if the whimsy were the richest of jokes. " Where's that island of yours, mate?"

" Straight behind you."

" I don't see anything but a small bump."

" That's all it is when the tide is full," she said.

A silence ensued—the silence of dipping oars and the plash of water. Finally Richard said:

" I think, if you'll permit it, I'll stop 'missing' you and call you Dorcas. May I do so?"

She considered this studiously, while her smiling eyes showed a new awareness of him. Then she nodded.

" Of course you may. We *have* been formal, haven't we?"

" Impeccable," he agreed, and added earnestly: " Dorcas, your star boarder's name is Richard."

" I know that," she laughed.

" Do you think you could say it?"

" Perhaps."

" You *are* a sedate little lady!"

" I sedate!"

This struck them both as immensely preposterous, and they laughed again. Richard had been wanting to laugh this long time. It lent a legitimate outlet for the joy pulsing rapturously within him.

He bent industriously to his oars after this interval, and presently they were alongside the protruding rock. A dozen gulls, perched on its serrated sides, watched them approach with bright, arrogant eyes.

" We'll climb up there and sit down," he said.

" There's not much room."

" There's enough," he assured her.

They felt the skiff's keel grate on the rocks. Richard hopped out and pulled the nose of the boat after him.

" Now, give me your hand and—jump!"

The next instant the girl was standing beside him.

" She's in shallow water," Dorcas told him. " When the tide turns, she'll be left high and dry, so we mustn't stay out here too long."

" Oh, we can get her off, all right!"

They scrambled to the pinnacle of the rocks, laughing, exulting in their adventure. Richard spread his coat for Dorcas to sit on, and they settled themselves side by side, their arms hugging their huddled knees.

The sun had left them, and the western horizon and the distant shore of the mainland were washed in brilliant color. With her chin resting on her locked fingers, the girl sat brooding, while Richard regarded her contentedly.

There was something almost poignantly young about her, with her bright hair rippling about her temples and clinging to her slender throat. She was a beautiful girl, he decided dispassionately, and presently she would be a beautiful woman. She needed no subtle artifices. How many women would look as enchanting in a gingham frock?

"Look!" she commanded softly.

He followed her glance, and saw that the moon, which had been hovering pallidly above them, was now riding forth, seeming to preen herself as she brightened. In the paler light, the circle about them seemed to decrease. Their world grew smaller, more intimate.

"It's as if we were in a royal tent and this was the throne," mused Richard, quite under the spell of the night.

"Like some ancient king," supplemented the girl, smiling.

"And his queen," added Richard promptly.

Oh, but this was delicious nonsense!

"A queen in a gingham dress?" she scoffed.

He turned to her, a gallant retort on his lips, but it died stillborn. His eyes met hers, wide, luminous, with a little abstracted smile in their depths. His face sobered. A puzzled wonder replaced his jovial grin—a wonder that merged into a startled horror. The inexplicable ecstasy that had seemed to emanate from all the subtle forces of nature around him, the rapture that had colored his world during these last few weeks, drained itself slowly, relentlessly into the depths of those serene eyes, leaving him stripped and chilly.

He dragged his eyes away, to stare out over the flat expanse of water, and over a world bereft of life and color, even as he was bereft. He understod now the secret of his ecstasy. Dorcas! And he had not even guessed that he loved her. Loved her! He, Della's husband, he who had no right to love any one!

"I think we had better start back. I'm afraid it 'll be pretty dark as it is."

Her voice seemed to come from a great distance, from the inaccessible place to which she had retreated now that he understood. He dared not look at her, but he said unsteadily:

"Oh, let's not go yet. The moon will think we're deserting her."

"But it's getting dark."

"You're not afraid?"

"Of course not."

"Then"—he forced the words to come playfully—"let's stay out a bit longer, and pretend that this is our particular tent."

When it was dark enough for him to see only the pallid outline of her face, he turned to her and began to talk feverishly, about the night, the moon, the city—anything, so that he might keep her there, so that he might listen to her voice and watch the movement of her lips.

He was aware that this was the end—that he must leave Standish, must place miles and more miles between himself and the agonizing sweetness of her presence; but he would take enough of her away with him to last forever. He would tuck it away deep, deep, secure from the sordid contacts of life. Sometimes, in the lonely years ahead, he could take out his memories and feast upon them, as one pores over some faintly fragrant album.

For some reason which neither could have explained, their voices were hushed. Once Richard changed his position. In moving, he felt her bare forearm against his sleeve. The contact left him shaken. He told himself that he must not touch her; but her voice, her nearness—these he might take.

"We must start," she said again. "I'm afraid it's awfully late."

But he refused to consult his watch. To-morrow he must go, but to-night—surely no one would begrudge him this much!

So they stayed on, while the moon moved pompously in her slow arc, and a chill breeze blew up out of the east. At last she rose, stiffly, purposefully.

"Goodness, I've been sitting in one position for so long that I'm all kinky!"

Their laughter was a little strained.

"Must we go?" he said wanly.

"Goodness, yes — and look!" A hundred feet of rock lay between them and the open water, and perched midway was the skiff. "Low tide!" she cried. "Now we've done it!"

"Oh, we can get her off," Richard assured her.

But dragging the boat across that jagged slope proved no easy task. They began by lifting her outright, but she was a stout little craft, and the girl's strength did not match her willingness.

"You sit down and boss the job," Richard commanded, and set to work alone.

He accomplished a foot or so at each effort, while Dorcas encouraged him from her perch on the rock. They launched her finally, after more than half an hour's work, and climbed in, panting.

"Now we'll both row back," announced the girl firmly, "because we shall be pulling against the tide, and that's hard work. We must be careful of the rocks on the way, too."

If it was hard work, Richard was unconscious of the fact. He knew only that Dorcas was beside him, that her long, clean strokes matched his, that they were pulling together with perfect accord. There was a sharp sweetness in this fact—it would swell his album of memories.

"I should have known better than to stay out so late," she said, and her self-disgust was shot through with a puzzled wonder at her strange deflection. "It isn't as if I didn't know about the tides and all."

"Oh, we'll be home presently," Richard assured her. "I hope you're not worried about having stayed late. I should feel very guilty if you were."

"No, I don't think it matters," she mused. "Of course, if dad had been home, he'd have been fearfully upset."

The stars had begun to pale when they approached the beach. Richard wondered vaguely where the hours had gone. It had seemed so short, their last night together, and yet dawn could not be far distant.

He was conscious of a sharp stab of guilt when they found that their worst problem was before them. The tide had left the little inlet dry, and in vain they pulled out of one muddy shallow, only to run aground in another.

"I'm afraid it's dead low," the girl said finally. "There's no place here where we can put ashore, if it is. We had better row up to the sluice."

This meant another half hour of hard rowing, for the sluice, where the fishermen kept their boats, marked the easternmost point of the village; but they yielded to necessity, and pulled off toward the sentinel fir trees that marked the channel.

The moon had strutted off, leaving the stars in full command; and these were already winking sleepily out when Richard made out the cluster of boats and the wharf ahead. They tied the skiff among her larger sisters, and climbed the wooden steps leading to the road. They started walking swiftly, for the sluice was a good half mile from the old Stayton house.

"What would dad say," asked the girl, with a nervous laugh, "if he knew I'd been out this late—almost all night?"

"He'd be sure to understand," said Richard reassuringly.

"But dad knows that I know the tides," she told him.

Richard's guilt was overwhelming him.

"I'm fearfully sorry," he said. "I don't know why I was such a thoughtless brute!"

"But it was my fault as much as yours."

She stumbled against him, and he crooked his arm.

"You're tired, too. Take my arm, and we'll make better time."

She slipped her hand under his arm, and he felt it pressing warmly against his side—felt it with a strange, detached sweetness, for in his heart he had already said good-by to her.

Through the rising mists of the oncoming dawn they trudged down the road. Presently the sun would rise, as it had risen yesterday, and the world would yawn and stretch itself, pick up the threads it had dropped the night before, and do the same thing over and over with its vast, immutable serenity.

"What time is it, please?" she asked, when the house loomed ahead mistily.

"Nearly three, Dorcas."

She gasped as they started slowly up the gravel walk toward the back door. With his hand on the knob, he turned to her. Her buoyant self-reliance had deserted her. In the pale light she looked like a sleepy, befuddled child. Her hair and frock were rumpled and her eyes drooping.

"You're not sorry, Dorcas?" Richard gently asked her. "Or shall I apologize for keeping you out like this?"

"But you didn't," she protested. "It was my fault, too." She appealed to him, with the ghost of her merry smile coming into her eyes. "I don't know why I stayed on like that, except that it seemed as if I must—as if I couldn't leave. It was so beautiful, wasn't it?"

"So beautiful," he murmured, "that I shall never forget it—never! Good night, Dorcas!"

"Good morning, rather—Richard!" she rejoined, and tiptoed across the dim kitchen toward the stairs.

They felt their way up the stairs, and exchanged another good night at her door before she slipped inside and closed it softly. As she closed it, another door down the hall opened swiftly, and Rose Ruby's face appeared in the aperture like a disembodied mask, her hooked nose and sharp chin meeting over her yellow smile.

For a moment the old woman hovered in the shadow, listening to Richard's fumbling steps coming down from the tower stairs, and to the cautious movements of the girl in the next room. Then she disappeared, as quietly and as swiftly as she had appeared, like a triumphant *Judy* hauled in by the marionette operator from behind.

VII

Old Peter returned, grumbling but enormously pleased with himself, on an early train the next day. He was voluble and bitter in his complaints about the train service.

" Mind you, only one train back in the evenin', and that never on time! If ye miss it, there's nothin' to do but wait till mornin'."

Dorcas knew the tale, and accepted it once more with expressions of sympathy. With her arms around his neck, she snuggled against his coat, while he held her closely.

" But you did have a good time, dear heart, and you *did* get your put-put!"

" Oh, I'm too old to have good times any more," grumbled Peter; " and I shouldn't be surprised if that engine was more beautiful than useful."

" Well, it 'll save you. You won't have to row any more, so you'll have no more trouble with your back."

" A lot you know about it!" scoffed Peter. " That there pain in my back ain't got rid of so easy. Besides, it's a good thing to have now and agin. How do you s'pose I know right now that there's a sou'easter blowin' up?"

" I expect you'll say you know by the pain in your back."

" Pre-cisely!" gloated Peter, and glanced about the kitchen. " Where's our star boarder?"

" He went to town, I think."

" And what's my girl been a doin' with herself?"

" This is Friday, daddy. What would I be doing but cleaning the parlor?"

" Now look here — why don't you get Rose Ruby to do that, like I been tellin' ye to?"

" She doesn't do it to suit me."

" A reg'lar old maid!" he accused fondly.

" And we could have some lettuce and tomatoes for dinner, if there was only some one to pick them," she mused.

Peter bristled.

" Now listen, young woman! I want to splice that engine on an'—"

" But that 'll wait! Do go out and find me some tomatoes—nice red ones!"

He held her off, taking a long breath in preparation for the harangue he was longing to deliver; but he spoke solicitously instead.

" You're lookin' peaked, kitten. Ain't sick, be ye?"

" You know I'm never sick, dad."

" Look peaked, all the same," said the old man obstinately, and started for the door. " If you don't put that lazy bag o' bones to work, I will!"

He bent to his task in the garden, soothed by the spicy scent of the tomato vines, chuckling to himself as he peered beneath the leaves. She hadn't asked him what he had brought her from town — pretended that it didn't matter, when she knew well enough that he never made a trip without bringing her back some gewgaw from the shops. Little minx!

He was twisting an enormous red tomato from its stalk when he was conscious of a shadow falling on the green leaves before him. He raised his head to meet the cunning, myopic gaze of Rose Ruby.

" Blame me, how'd *you* get there? You get inside in a hurry, and help Dorcas with her cleanin'."

" I guess like she needs help to-day," grinned Rose Ruby, without moving.

" She always needs it, and that's what I pay you fer, see? Get, now!"

" But to-day "—the old woman produced one of her inimitable grins—" I s'pect she needs it more'n mostly. So would you, if you hadn't had no sleep!"

" No sleep!" He rested back on his heels, peering up at her anxiously. " Didn't Dorcas sleep last night? Were she sick?"

" How do I know?"

" Well, hang it, don't ye?"

" How could I, when I warn't there to see?"

" But see here, ye rattlin' bag of bones, I told ye to stay to my house all night, 'cause I might not get back. I *didn't* get back, and—"

" An' so I did. I stayed all night," said Rose Ruby, with a cackle. " I wuz there!"

" Well, then—"

"But Dorcas, she warn't!"

"Warn't what?"

"Warn't here—in the house."

Peter rose slowly to his feet, more puzzled than disturbed at this curious recital.

"What do ye mean? If she weren't in the house last night, where was she?"

"How should I know?"

He made a swift lunge toward the old harridan.

"Blame me if I—"

"Well, how *should* I?" repeated Rose Ruby, backing away from him. "I only know she come in nigh onto sunup—dawn, it was."

He regarded her blankly for a moment, his little bright eyes almost disappearing in the confused cloud that enveloped him. Rose Ruby was quick to follow up the advantage his silence gave her.

"They was somewhere all night—I don't know where they was."

"They?" echoed Peter.

"Dorcas an' that man in the tower—the boarder—*Mr. Brown.*"

The great frame towered there for a moment as quiescent as the immutable serenity about him. Then the old woman's words shaped themselves into hideous form. His body began to heave and his arms shot up and out.

"I'll kill ye fer that!" he shouted. "I'll kill ye fer that, ye lyin', blasphemin' old hag! I'll kill ye!"

She moved off, keeping her eyes on his distorted face, and moving her cracked lips in a perfect frenzy of triumph.

"I tell ye it's the truth! Didn't I see 'em come in with my own eyes nigh to dawn? Didn't I see 'em comin' down the road arm in arm? If ye don't believe me, go up to the sluice—her boat's there. Warn't low tide at three this mornin'? An' would she take her boat 'way up to the sluice if she could 'a' brought it back to the beach? Don't that prove I ain't lyin'? Go up to the sluice an' see fer yourself, if you don't believe me!"

"I'll kill ye—kill ye!" he was muttering, but the words were mechanical.

He faced the old woman across the crumpled tomato plants that his heedless feet had broken and trodden into the soil, and beneath his ragged mustache his teeth were chattering.

"I tell ye it's so! She was out all night with that man, an' the whole town 'll be talkin' about it soon!"

He made a dozen futile efforts to speak, and at last the words scraped their way up from his throat.

"Then it's because ye told 'em. Ye lie! I'll kill ye!"

She turned and hurried through the garden and across the fields toward her crazy little shack, with her ragged skirt flapping about her bony limbs, and her yellow smile much in evidence.

Peter paused within a few feet of the white fence that girdled his garden, and stood with the strained, insensible immobility of a mechanical toy suddenly run down. His senses were floundering uncertainly among the morass of words that had fallen from the old woman's mouth. He would kill her!

The whole village was talking about it, she said. Well, that was because she had lied. His girl—his Dorcas—out all night with a man! Preposterous!

Yet if it were so—well, she might have been out in her boat, and might have been becalmed. Then he remembered that she could not have been sailing.

What had the old hag said about the sluice? That the skiff was there. Well, if it was there, it meant that she couldn't get to the beach because it was low tide. Low tide was at three o'clock in the morning, or between three and four.

He was striding now, still without the consciousness that he was moving, down the road. He covered it with great long paces, the visor of his old cap standing out over one ear. Neighbors called to him as he passed the cottages, but he did not hear. It was as if all the enginery of his mind had stopped until he could prove the fallacy of the old hag's tale.

At the bend in the road he quickened his steps. Not in years had he walked so rapidly, and his heart was pounding.

A few fishermen were about the wooden wharf, pottering with their boats. Peter returned their greetings mechanically. His eyes flashed over the tied cluster of boats, and, through a speckled red haze, came to rest finally on his daughter's skiff.

"Hear ye went up to New London to buy a engine off Tad Bowen yestiddy," ventured Tim Woodhouse, who was industriously scraping the peach bloom off his lobster crates.

But Peter was already making his way back up the road, cursing at the zigzag curves that had suddenly appeared in it.

"Guess old Pete must 'a' been dippin' into Tad's cider pretty good," hazarded Tim, and went back to his crates with a chuckle.

It was a long walk back to the white house. The sun poured hotly down upon the old man's head, and the way was strangely beset with twists and turns. The neighbors, seeing him stagger past, nodded sagely. Old Pete Stayton off on a spree at his age!

The sun could do queer things to a man. It seemed to set things on fire in him. Queer thoughts flared up—thoughts of the old gun propped on the mantle behind the stove. It was a good gun!

Well, her boat had been in the sluice. She had been out all night with the boarder—with Mr. Brown, as he called himself; but his real name wasn't Brown. Well, it didn't matter now. Peter gave vent to a sinister, unholy chuckle.

Like a buzzard circling around and around its grisly objective, so Peter's thoughts circled around and around the horrible facts he had learned. The nearer he approached to them, the more horrible they appeared. His daughter — and the man he had taken in! No wonder she had looked "peaked" that morning! No wonder she had forgotten to ask for her present from the city!

He was nearing the house, lying calm and white and tranquil in the midday peace. Something of his sanity returned to him at sight of its familiar lines. For nearly two hundred years it had stood there. It had harbored his father, and his father's father before that. Never had doubt or suspicion found the Stayton home a salutary breeding spot—never until now!

He brought up short before the house, shaking, half mad, his thoughts rushing wildly ahead to the gun that lay behind the stove. Caution, he told himself—he must use caution!

Dorcas met him at the door, and raised horrified hands at sight of him. The perspiration was rolling down from under the old man's cap and trickling from the end of his nose. His little eyes were threaded with skeins of blood, and his hands were shaking.

"Father, now *where* have you been? Here I send you out to pick tomatoes, and you go traipsing off to town or somewhere—and dinner getting cold!"

"Hello, cap'n!" greeted Richard, from the table. "Dorcas and I thought you were lost."

So the stranger called her "Dorcas" now, did he?

"No, I warn't lost."

Peter was oddly subdued. He went to the sink, washed his hands, and splashed water on his hot face.

"Now, father, do hurry!"

"I'm comin', girl—I'm comin'."

He sat down, and she brought him a heaped plate from the oven, where she had been keeping it warm.

"Richard picked the tomatoes, or we'd have had none." So it was "Richard" now, was it? "And some clumsy creature has been trampling down some of our best vines, too!"

Peter made a pretense of eating, and moved his knife and fork about his plate with quite a clatter, but this did not deceive the girl.

"Daddy, I'm afraid you celebrated too much last night."

"Oh, ye think so, do ye?"

He was careful not to raise his eyes from the table.

"You're not eating your dinner."

"Oh, I'm eatin' enough."

He realized now that his guest was unusually quiet, and spoke very softly, very suavely.

"Ye don't seem very chipper to-day, Mr. Brown. Ain't feelin' bad, be ye?"

Richard's eyes wandered past the girl, past her father, to the fields beyond. The old pinched look of frustration was about his thin lips.

"I'm none too chipper, cap'n," he said evenly. "You see, the fact is, I shall have to be getting back to the city very soon. I find that I must leave your fair village to-morrow."

Peter's fork fell with a clatter to his plate. It was like a sharp cry in that wilderness of silence. After a moment the old man raised his eyes furtively, and saw that his daughter's color had faded, that her eyes were wide and startled.

"You're — going away?" she faltered thinly.

Richard nodded, apparently absorbed in his plate.

"Oh, be ye, Mr. Brown?" asked Peter gently. "Be ye, now?"

"Lord knows I don't want to," said Richard, with an effort to make his voice sound casual and hearty. "I can't tell you how happy I've been here with you. I don't think I've ever been happier anywhere; but "—he shrugged—" we can't be happy all the time, I suppose, and I must get back to my duties in town."

Peter was nodding thoughtfully, and once or twice his eyes wandered to the mantle behind the range. It was a meal of strange, pulsating silence, like the silence of the sea, which even then was ominously quiet as it watched a series of slow, drab clouds mobilize in the eastern sky.

When Dorcas began to clear the table, Peter stood in the doorway, his lips and fingers moving uselessly, his eyes on those approaching clouds. So the stranger was going away, was he, going back to the city, leaving his girl stripped of her good name and of her happiness?

Dorcas was moving silently and with lagging steps about her work. That was what they always did, the city man and the country girl. Then, suddenly, Peter was lashing himself with reproaches. It was his fault! He had taken the man in—a stranger, just for a whim. He had exposed his daughter to the danger of that daily contact. *He* was to blame!

What was there to do, save kill the man? His head swam. What did the Bible say? "Thou shalt not kill!"

Suddenly he laughed. It was a ghastly sound breaking through the girl's preoccupation. She turned toward him quickly.

"Did you speak, father?"

"Yes," he said, and laughed again. "Yes, I spoke, Dorie. I was jest rememberin' that I had some business uptown. I'll be back fer supper, though."

"But it's going to storm, dear."

"Yes," assented Peter softly. "You're right, girl. It do look like dirty weather."

A moment later he was plodding up the road. Behind him the marshaled clouds advanced. A chuckle churned its way up through his throat. A fine night it would be! A fine night for a wedding—for such a wedding! Oh, the city man might be smooth, but he was no smoother than old Pete Stayton, when driven to defend his two most precious possessions—his pride and his daughter.

He had thought of killing the stranger. Murder was still in his heart; but you couldn't marry a dead man. Not that Richard wanted to marry his daughter; but there was the pistol—and a pistol was a good persuader!

(*To be continued in the April number of* Munsey's Magazine)

TO A DISCONSOLATE BEAUTY

Lose not that face we all adore,
  That face in momentary eclipse;
A thousand lovers watch and wait
  To taste that honeycomb, your lips;
Nor, spendthrift, give to time and fate
  Those eyes of May, nor close the door
On bloom and joy that wait for you
With singing seas and skies all blue.

Give not to Death, that hungry lover,
The flowers the whole world's bees hang over,
  Waiting to drain
  All your strange sweetness yet again.

It were too sore and too condign defeat
To be a bankrupt of all the whelming sweet
  Still in your heart and in your ivory breast.
Oh, wake and listen, and give heed to this—
Myriads are waiting, sad-eyed, for your kiss,
  And the wide earth is waiting for the rest
Of the deep beauty that abides in you,
Still and forever made of stars and dew!

Richard Leigh

Wanted—A Palace

A FOOTNOTE TO THE HISTORY OF A RECENT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

By Oma Almona Davies

THIS world is the most amazing and enchanting place! Everything is amazing, everything is enchanting, when one is not quite eighteen, and is adventuring for the first time in a foreign city. If the city be Genoa, with its perfume of orange and citron and jasmine, with bells, bells eternally chiming, with its iridescent houses, its antique sea, its fortressed hills—

Everything is amazing, everything is enchanting, but everything is terrifying, too, when one is not quite eighteen.

Sidony Maril hesitated, as usual, on the landing of the staircase of the Grand Hotel of All Nations, and excitedly surveyed the weaving throng in the court below. They wove the same tale for her every night—a thrilling tale punctuated by the exclamation points of the evening suits, by the dashes and flaring commas of the dinner gowns. It took courage to interject herself into the midst of that colorful epic, the sound of which rose to her like a complex chant—her, who couldn't contribute a syllable!

"Maril?" Sidony started as she heard her father's name, and raised her eyes to two ladies who had paused on the landing near her. "Yes, that Chesterfield-looking person standing there by the fountain. Really, that's what they do call him—the Chesterfield of the conference. Have you heard the rumor that he's going to open the Pontormo palace for some sort of an affair? Wouldn't that be—"

"The Pontormo? Open again—to the public?" Her companion gave a skeptical chuckle, and shook her auburn head emphatically. "The Pontormo will never be opened—not while the old duke is living. Not even your wonderful Maril could get foot inside the Palazzo Pontormo. I know Genoa!"

"And I know Maril—at least, by reputation!" The other laughingly insisted. "Whatever he wants, he—"

They were two steps below Sidony now—three—four—

Like a hungry wren, she fluttered down the staircase behind them. At the bottom she picked up another crumb:

"No, he isn't married. At least, his wife died a long time ago—an American, they say, and—"

Well, Sidony knew that, of course. She stood for a moment staring after the auburn-haired lady with something of pity. As if any one lived who could deny her father a palace, or anything else! Then she threaded her way toward him.

He was talking, as usual, to a group of diplomats. She sat down on the rim of the fountain behind them.

The fountain splashed. Her heart seemed to splash with it, and with each splash to send warm, pink tides of pride swirling upward into her cheeks as she sat and stared at this monumental father—stared down the well cut length of him, from his close hair sweeping back from his forehead to his narrow, nervous feet. And with the pride there was a tiny ache of jealousy that every one else seemed to know this strange father better than did she.

For he was a stranger to her. How many times had she seen him? A dozen, perhaps—this marvelous creature who had come stepping across seas to visit briefly with her, sometimes in the winter at Mme. Erkley's School, near Baltimore, sometimes in the summer at Aunt Martha's, in the Catskills. This time, as an incredible graduation gift, she had been invited to accompany him to the international world conference at Genoa.

He looked worn, troubled, Sidony thought, during this second week of the conference. If she could only be of some service to him!

A young aid approached. Maril withdrew from his companions. The two faced the fountain.

"I regret to report, sir, that the Palazzo Pontormo is not available. The duke remains entirely unsympathetic, and insists that the palace should remain closed."

Then Sidony saw a new Maril—a Maril with a sudden cleft between his eyebrows, a Maril with arms folded in judgment, a Maril with a bitter edge in his voice:

"It seems incredible! When the world is dying—black and blue from its hurts—men are criminal when they refuse to aid in whatever way they can. Luckily, this is a trivial matter; but the point is that such an attitude is as reprehensible as if the issue were an important one."

Some one tapped his arm, and he turned away. The aid disappeared. Sidony still sat, straining forward. Then he *had* been refused! Who was this man who had dared to refuse him?

A fever flush of anger filled the faint hollows of the girl's temples, brushed her cheeks, and lay in the hollow of her chin. Her outspread fingers beat like futile wings against the unyielding medieval rim of the fountain.

II

It is an amazing and enchanting thing to dine each night with the Chesterfield of a great international conference; but it also devolves much responsibility upon a young lady who aspires to be entirely proper and superlatively entertaining. If one is perishing from curiosity, and yet knows that Mme. Erkley would never sanction any expression of it—

The delicious *fritto misto* had been served, and Sidony, taut on the edge of her chair, one hand clenched in her lap, was taking intense little bites, before the first thin wedge of opportunity edged into her father's affable conversation.

"Oh, yes!" Sidony answered his question earnestly. "I do like Genoa very, very much; but it is different from Baltimore and the Catskills, isn't it? A little frightening"—she groped for a more adequate word—"a little remote." And then, in a breathless rush: "The palaces—the palaces are so large—"

She had said the word. She had flung her tiny challenge; but her father caught another word and tossed it back to her on the edge of an approving chuckle.

"Remote! That's just the word for Genoa. So you felt it!"

His eyes, flatteringly appreciative, rested upon her. As if the word had been a key, nicely fitted, which unlocked a chamber in his mind, he began to talk. He talked as the Maril of the conference talked, his words eager yet precise, his gestures boyish in their swiftness, yet entirely organized. Sidony felt that she could almost see his mind darting upon his thoughts, lashing them into words.

"It's the most remote city in the world. There's a place in Tibet, and one in Java—but no! One would become *en rapport* there sooner than in Genoa. Why? Who knows? Her great age, perhaps. Her isolation, perhaps, backed up here between sea and mountains. And then her history—self-contained, self-sufficient; and to think"—he clipped off his words characteristically with his brief smile—"that my little American girl sensed all this!"

Oh, it was wonderful when his keen eyes danced approvingly like that! It made one entirely reckless.

"Papa!" She hadn't meant to say it. "The palace—there was some palace—out there by the fountain—you wanted it—the Pon—Pon—"

"Oh, the Pontormo? Yes." His eyes brooded away from her. "You see, my dear, there must be some beer and skittles in every phase of life—even in this tough old diplomatic game; and perhaps all the more because it is tough and old and diplomatic. The economic pot has been boiling hard—reparations, boundaries, exchanges—rather hot stuff. If it doesn't get cooled off, it may set the whole world on fire. If this meet is not a success, there will be conferences and conferences and conferences, and all their wind will only fan the flame."

His eyes became introspective again. Sidony's arm shot pleadingly along the tablecloth.

"The point is, my daughter, that this is the psychological moment for a little social breath. I've an idea it's not such a trivial matter as it might perhaps appear. A single hour has changed many a chapter of history!"

"A reception! How splendid!" Sidony

cried, and added with some pride: "You see, I know all about receptions. Mme. Erkley always lets the graduating class have one. There are ices and little cakes, and every one is in very good humor. Oh, it's a wonderful idea! But won't Mr. Pontormo—the—the duke—"

For a moment Maril's quick smile lighted his dark features.

"You little American! No, Mr. Pontormo won't. Mr. Pontormo is an old, old man, and he has renounced the world and the flesh, including international conferences, and has given himself over to the devil—the devil of bitterness and of self-imposed loneliness. His palace is the one I wanted for this affair that I have in mind. It has the largest private salon in Genoa, hanging balconies, marvelous terraces, a roof floored in marble, with a view—during this moon—"

He had risen now, and was waiting for Sidony to pass before him.

"Oh, well, it's a very minor issue. I am on a committee to-night. Shall I help you find Mrs. Bates-Smith?"

"I think he is a—an old—conundrum!" Sidony recklessly blazed forth the term which had once brought upon her a day of penitential bread and milk at Mme. Erkley's. "Oh, if I only, only had a palace!" she added, with her serious chin uptilted.

From the door of the salon, they discovered Mrs. Bates-Smith embroidering in her accustomed corner. Since poor Aunt Martha had been detained in the Catskills by a sprained ankle, Mrs. Bates-Smith had become Sidony's chaperon. She was one of those hybrid Americans of uncertain age whom one finds embroidering in salons here and there over Europe—women who have vaguely renounced the land of their birth, and as vaguely adopted some alien city as their own; just as the hermit crab, at a certain stage of its existence, crawls from its native shelter and complacently ensconces itself in the shell of some whelk or other mollusk.

Two other ladies were with Mrs. Bates-Smith this night—wives of secretaries, whom Sidony had met. As she approached, she heard:

"About sixteen, I think."

"Not more than that, I should say. Very immature—"

Sidony realized, with a shock, that they had been speaking of her. As she slipped into a chair by the side of Mrs. Bates-Smith, a questioning hush fell, followed by conscious vivacity on the part of a secretarial lady:

"Oh, and I must tell you! I did the Palazzo Cecchi this morning. Such wonderful paintings! Have you been there, Miss Maril?"

Sidony murmured a negative. She sat, as tall as she could, on the edge of her chair. She wanted to scream:

"I am almost eighteen! I am almost eighteen!"

She had known that she was criminally young, but to be taken for sixteen!

"You must see it. The terraces—lovely! Frescoes—staircases—orangery—"

Sidony had turned for comfort to Mrs. Bates-Smith's nose. It was remarkably like Aunt Martha's, with its little hump on the end. She swallowed and clenched her hands.

Then, because she knew she wasn't being polite, she made a conscious effort to be attentive. Her mind leaped back over its lapse, picking up phrases she had not known she had heard:

"Frescoes—terraces—enormous salon—"

Her eyes suddenly widened. She started forward.

"Does it really have terraces and an enormous salon?"

The sprightly raconteur, who had bounded some seconds before from the Palazzo Cecchi to the Monte Righi, and thence to the monuments in the Campo Santo, also widened her eyes, while her brain and her tongue hung suspended. It was Mrs. Bates-Smith who spoke, as her habit was, without raising her eyes from the fuchsia she was forcing into mercerized bloom.

"Oh, yes, my dear! The Palazzo Cecchi is one of the very lovely places in Genoa. I think its porcelains can scarcely be surpassed."

Sidony's eyes wandered over the tapestried walls of the salon, over its lofty, painted ceiling; but her mind was off on a new and tantalizing journey of its own.

III

MRS. BATES-SMITH did not figure largely in Sidony's plans the following day, though the girl did look for her, after luncheon, as a sort of vague propitiation to Aunt Martha. Poor Aunt Martha, past worthy grand matron of the Order of Chaperons!

She found Mrs. Bates-Smith embroidering by the side of the fountain in the court.

Her needle was pricking into life a leaf the like of which never grew on any known variety of fuchsia. Her nose was heartbreakingly like Aunt Martha's to-day, with the hump in it touched by a rosy ray from the stained glass roof above.

Sidony moistened her upper lip.

"Genoa seems such a quiet place! I was just wondering if one would be safe—for a stroll—"

Mrs. Bates-Smith had this in common with the other hermit crabs—she was extremely tenacious of her adopted whelk, and extremely vigilant in protecting it. She now laid her embroidery in her lap, terrifyingly folded her hands upon it, and looked at Sidony.

"Genoa," she said impressively, "is the safest city in Europe, bar none. In my fifteen years here I have never heard of a misfortune to a woman of discretion, and in my next fifteen years I never expect to hear of any."

"I thought I might step into the Cecchi palace." Sidony's finger tightened in her guidebook. "It's only just off this first *piazza,* isn't it?"

Mrs. Bates-Smith placidly took up her embroidery.

"The Piazza Fontane Morose — first street leading off to the north, the Via Garibaldi. You couldn't possibly miss the Cecchi, my dear, for it is the only palace in Genoa with a deep cream façade. The others are all white or red or gray." She drew a speculative thread. "Of course, if you feel timid, I shall—"

Sidony sprang to her feet.

"Oh, no! At least, thank you, thank you so very much, Mrs. Bates-Smith!"

She fluttered away. Light as a bubble, she crossed the lava pavement of the Piazza Fontane Morose, and went down the Via Garibaldi, between its heavy Renaissance palaces. There it was—the deep cream façade. All the others were white or red or gray.

Sidony palpitated slowly past it, and back again to its wide flight of marble steps. She stared up at its stern immensity, and opened her guidebook. She knew the passage her numbed forefinger had been guarding, word for word; but she had an undefined sense of needing once more to look at the familiar, friendly English words. It was as if, before she surrendered herself to this frowning medieval pile, she wanted the tangible assurance that she, too, had behind her a great race, a great history, a great tongue.

> The Palazzo Cecchi will repay a visit. Open from one to three; closed on Friday, Maundy Thursday, Easter, Whitsunday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. No fee.

She closed the book and resolutely climbed the steps. She had supposed that the door at the top would be open, but it was not. It looked frightfully massive and forbidding; but the façade *was* deep cream. She tapped the gray-green dolphin's head which served as knocker.

The door was opened by a large man with a large, impassive face. He was clothed in dull livery. He did not step aside for her to enter, but stood speechless, looking at her with unblinking eyes.

"I came to see the palace," she said.

He answered in Italian, and continued to gaze at her.

Sidony felt a slight anger. Aunt Martha's servants were better trained, and Mme. Erkley's ever so much better. She elevated her chin and thrust forward the guidebook.

"I came to see the palace. These are the hours, the book says."

Again the man said something in Italian. Sidony's perplexed gaze wandered from him to another individual, of whom she had been dimly conscious as lingering in the vestibule behind the doorkeeper. This person now stepped forward and doffed his cap.

"Pardon, may I be of service? This man is saying that he does not understand English."

The speaker was evidently a tourist. His tweeds were tucked into golf stockings, and he carried a camera slung diagonally from his shoulder. He glanced from Sidony to her guidebook, and back to Sidony again.

"I came to see the palace," explained Sidony for the third time. "These are the hours, aren't they?" She added, in a little rush of verification: "Or you wouldn't be here!"

The young man spoke in Italian to the doorkeeper. Then, with a smile which showed some very good teeth, he stepped aside for Sidony to enter.

"How stupid!" she remarked. "Why should they have a doorkeeper who doesn't understand English? And why should they have a doorkeeper at all when the book says it's open to the public?"

"'Dost swear by the book?'" parried the stranger, with another flash of teeth.

Now Sidony had less than a bowing acquaintance with Shakespeare, having passed him by as lightly as was compatible with Mme. Erkley's curriculum, and she did not recognize him now. Likewise, she suddenly remembered that she had less than a bowing acquaintance with the young man who had propounded the strange question. She drew herself up to her full height, which was not very high.

"I am very grateful to you for your assistance," she said gravely, and stepped past him.

The great door clanged shut. She stood still for a moment while its hollow echoes rang around her, and in that moment centuries fell upon her. She was in a long, vaulted vestibule. Its walls were hung with armor, and its sole furnishings were huge carved chests evenly spaced along its walls. It was so entirely different from her conception of a palace that her feet lagged as she went forward. Yet somewhere in this dim pile there was an "enormous salon," "terraces"—

She paused half down the length of the gallery before a door inscribed—

SCULTURE DI BRONZO

She opened this door and took a few steps into the room. It was an oblong apartment, ill lighted. Bronze figures, large and small, stared somberly at her from the shadows. Sidony retreated, and closed the door so hurriedly that the medieval echoes rang again. She drove her feet to a door exactly opposite, inscribed—

MARMI ANTICHI

People and bits of people in very old marble lay or stood about this room—a horrid, frozen clinic of them. Sidony shuddered. The legless gentlemen, the armless ladies, the sightless eyes! And just opposite the door, prone upon a slab, a life-size young man with very curly hair—horrible natural hair in the dim light! She could see a broken nose and a broken foot, and the stump of an arm extended toward her—toward her—

Sidony suddenly found herself in the vestibule again.

Were there no visitors to-day, except that one young man in tweeds, stooping and running his finger along the pattern of a carved chest? If only there were a woman—but there was no sound of footsteps, no sound of anything.

What if those figures on either side of her, the brunette bronzes, the blond marbles, should suddenly come to life? What if those doors between which she stood midway should slowly open, and the young man on the slab should slowly stir his mutilated limbs? There was a perfectly truthful girl at Mme. Erkley's who had seen, passing the footboard of her bed—

"Will you not allow me to assist you again? I've just been giving the place a once-over."

"Oh! Oh!" gasped Sidony.

But the young man who halted before her was not legless or armless, and his eyes were not sightless. They were extraordinarily friendly eyes, and his golf stockings were very reassuring. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, schoolboy fashion, as he hesitated before her.

"I promise not to intrude, but if I could show you—"

"I came to see the salon and the terraces. The book says—"

Then, remembering the stranger's former disconcerting remark anent the book, Sidony broke off; but he did not repeat his error. Instead, he gestured formally toward the end of the vestibule and remarked:

"The state apartments, you mean? The staircase to the second floor is behind that marble fret there." And then, as they turned down the hall: "It's a peculiarity of Italian houses that the state apartments are always on the second or the third floor."

He talked very comfortably and entertainingly, and Sidony did not mind, even though other broken antique figures flanked the wide staircase which they were mounting. She was mainly occupied in wondering of what nationality her new companion was. He was not Italian, for he was decidedly fair; scarcely French—he was too robust; not American or English, for he spoke with just the faintest tinge of some accent.

"This is what you came to see, I fancy."

He lifted the flap of a heavily padded leather curtain. Sidony passed beneath the curtain, and took a couple of steps. Her palms flew together in such quick ecstasy that the guidebook fell to the floor. Even then she did not notice, but continued to gaze, entranced.

Her companion's eyes twinkled down upon her.

"It is rather corking, isn't it?"

It was a great hall, octagonal in shape, with a mosaic floor in intricate particolored designs, and a richly coffered ceiling. Its high walls were frescoed their entire length, the colors dimmed to exquisite pastels. On either side they were broken by lofty glass windows, set in onyx framework, which yielded glimpses of fountained terraces with palms and drooping marble figures. A gallery with protruding loggias, supported by colonnades, ran about three sides of the apartment.

"Oh, it will do! It will do!"

"Will do?"

But Sidony was skipping from him toward the windows.

"And there — there are the terraces!" She spun about upon her heel and lifted her shining eyes to his as he joined her. "Oh, it will entirely do!"

The young man rubbed his cheek with a puzzled palm.

"Will do?" he repeated.

Sidony told him, then. Being a conscientious little person, she told him in full detail, neglecting neither the secretarial lady nor Mrs. Bates-Smith as she embroidered fuchsias by the side of the fountain.

"And I'm perfectly sure that this Cecchi palace will do. Why, it seems as if it couldn't be any larger, and I know there's nothing so lovely in the world! Papa must have forgotten how large and how lovely it is. I know, when I bring him to see it, he'll say that old Mr. Pontormo—the duke, you know—can just keep his old place!"

"Shall we sit down?" muttered her companion, deep in his throat. "This is a bit thick!"

They sat down, one on either end of a porphyry bench. Sidony ran her complacently appraising eyes over the details of the salon. The young man elevated his knee, clasped it tightly between both hands, and gazed at her with frowning absorption.

"There are seats enough," Sidony estimated. "Mr. Cecchi would probably bring in more, if we needed them. He's so thoughtful, papa says; but people won't want to sit much. They'll be walking around talking about those tapestries, and all those glass cases look interesting. I remember Mrs. Bates-Smith said something about porcelains. The men will like that old armor, too."

"You said something about the other—the other palace—the—"

"The Pon-tor-mo," Sidony instructed, with slow pride. "Well, I can't tell you much about it, except that it's shut up tighter than a vacuum tube. It's owned by an old man whose name is also Pontormo, and then he has other names, too, but I've forgotten them. Anyhow, he's very cross and selfish, and won't let anybody see the inside any more."

The young man's heels, suddenly released, struck the floor with a sharp report.

"Oh, I say! I wouldn't say that, you know! He may have his reasons. Suppose he were ill—paralyzed—"

"Aunt Martha's father had three strokes, and he got sweeter and sweeter until he died," returned Sidony, shaking her head.

She had never experienced such heady triumph. It exalted her above herself. She was no longer Sidony Maril, who looked sixteen and was very immature. She was a woman who had had a vision, and who was now in process of most wonderfully materializing it — materializing it for a marvelous father, for a marvelous world!

She was a little dizzy with it all, as she sat there on the end of the porphyry bench and gazed with bedazzled eyes over the room and back again to the young man. Even he, a stranger though he was, taller and older than herself, contributed to her sense of self-sufficiency. He looked so puzzled, so utterly stricken, as he sat straining at his knee, never taking his eyes from her. Sidony smiled at him brightly.

"I don't mean to be too hard on that old man," she explained; "but it's very wrong not to be hospitable toward the world when it comes to your own city."

"Perhaps," the stranger admitted vaguely, staring away from her. "But there might be reasons, you know. The world might have nicked him here and there till he got a bit sore, don't you think?"

"But it's the world that has given him all his nice things!" Sidony cried. "It's as little as he could do to let the world come and look at them when it wants to!"

"Oh, I say, you know! I don't see it that way!" The young man shot to his feet and rammed his fists into his pockets. "The world hasn't given him his treasures. His family got them—he got them—through his own efforts. The world hasn't given him anything!"

"Well, anyway," Sidony temporized, "even that way, it just looks to me like a big, strong dog that had gone out and got bones and bones, heaps of them, that it never could eat, and then won't let other perfectly nice, hungry dogs have any of them. No!" She sighed, as she looked up at him, and shook her head. "I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid he's a—an old—conundrum!"

Her companion made no reply to this. Glancing at him as he flinched his shoulder restlessly from her, Sidony had a sudden fear that she had been too emphatic. He had been very agreeable. He was very good to look at—his firm chin slightly cleft, his blue-gray eyes, his fair, careful hair.

A smile almost twisted his lips as he looked down at her again and suggested:

"Perhaps you'd care to look at some of these cabinets? Some of them are really worth while."

They spent a wonderful three-quarters of an hour, then. The new acquaintance had a marvelous fund of knowledge about enamels, wood carvings, ivories, and tapestries. Sidony's eyes grew wider and wider. She split both of her snug little gloves as she unconsciously hugged the guidebook tighter and tighter.

"If I had known how much you knew, I think I should have been afraid of you!"

They had been around the room and were standing near the leather curtain again.

He threw back his head and laughed.

"That's a good one! Now you make me hesitate to show you the marbles below. I don't want you afraid of me, you know. You'll have to promise—"

Sidony shuddered. Her serious, flushed face upturned to him pleadingly.

"Please, I don't want to see them! I—I did see them. And I must go now." She hesitated. "I wouldn't mind, though, if you would walk with me past the door where they are."

Even so, the centuries, heavy and lonely, fell upon her as she stepped off the stairs into the dim vault of the vestibule again.

"It seems strange there are not more visitors," she observed nervously. "Why, you and I were the only ones!" She lost a step, stung by the discovery. "But this was the day, and these were the hours," she justified, clutching the guidebook.

"This was the day, and these were the hours," mused the young man. Then his lips parted over his very good-looking teeth. "But, after all, there were visitors! You were here, and I was here!"

His tone was warm and intimate. Sidony suddenly wondered if she were never to see him again—or would he ask to call? A shiver of excitement zigzagged down her spine. If Mrs. Bates-Smith and the secretarial lady could see her in the hotel salon—there in the corner by the palms—her hair done high on her head—a tall young man leaning toward her—would it not absolve her from the crime of youth?

But he did not ask to call, nor did it appear that he intended doing so. They were pausing just behind the massive front door. Sidony, overwhelmed with the necessity of making a correct farewell, became a very, very young Sidony, agonizingly uncertain. Should one shake hands? Or should one merely bow? What, oh, what should a panic-stricken girl do?

The young man seemed to have grown immensely taller. He seemed very far away, as she slowly lifted her eyes.

"I am very grateful to you for your assistance." Her lips automatically recited Mme. Erkley's polite formula. "Good-by, Mr.—Mr.—"

"They used to call me Rugby Sand at Oxford," he twinkled.

"Oh, Oxford!" Sidony repeated, with formal politeness. Ought she to say something more, or should she go? "Aunt Martha went to school at Oxford, Ohio. All girls, though."

"I see where I made a mistake in my choice of Oxfords."

"Oh, no!" Sidony gasped, horrified. "They wouldn't have let you!" She must get away! Without intending it in the least, her small hand shot toward him. "Good-by, Mr.—Sand!"

His warm hand clasped hers tightly for a second. Then he swung open the door, offering, as he did so, to call a carriage, or to walk with her to her hotel; but Sidony flutteringly declined, and went swiftly out into the sunlight.

IV

Mrs. Bates-Smith was still sitting by the side of the fountain, calmly subverting the laws of nature. Having propagated two flowers and three leaves, she was now fashioning a belated stem to uphold them. Beside her sat the deep-voiced wife of a famous diplomat.

But Sidony, being really not Sidony at this moment, but a maker of history, did not care how deep-voiced the other lady was, or how famous her husband was. She went directly to them.

"I found it!" The flame in her cheeks lighted tiny dancing tapers in her eyes. "It's just perfectly wonderful! It's just perfectly grand! Such terraces! Such a marvelous hall—so big, and such a curious shape, a perfect octagon! And then the cunning little balconies—"

"Octagon?" Mrs. Bates-Smith drew a slow thread. "An octagonal salon in the Cecchi?"

"Oh, yes—upstairs, you know, with the balconies out over it, and the tapestries hanging down over the railings!"

Mrs. Bates-Smith's needle poised motionless. She raised her eyes to the wife of the diplomat.

"The only palace in Genoa with an octagonal salon is the Pontormo; and the only salon in Genoa with an overhanging balcony is in the Pontormo," she declared, manifestly puzzled. The diplomatic lady nodded acquiescence. "Did you go down the Via Garibaldi, until you came to a palace with a cream façade?"

Sidony stared from one to the other, vaguely disturbed.

"It had a cream façade. I came to a big iron gate with a court behind it, and then I went on and up the steps—why, wasn't it the right thing to do? I rang the bell, and a man let me in."

"The Cecchi is the only palace with a cream façade," ruminated Mrs. Bates-Smith; "but the octagonal—"

The diplomatic lady shook her head.

"No—the Pontormo is cream, too. It was repainted recently. The painters' scaffolding was still up when we arrived, three weeks ago."

Mrs. Bates-Smith deliberately laid down her embroidery and terrifyingly folded her hands upon it.

"Then you were in the Pontormo," she pronounced impressively. "And it has been closed to the public for four years. *How* did you get in?"

"Oh! No! No!" cried Sidony a little wildly. "Oh, no—it was the Cecchi! It was the Cecchi!"

With the two surprised faces blurring into a whole circle of surprised faces before her, she sat down unsteadily upon the rim of the fountain.

"I don't mean to contradict, Mrs. Bates-Smith. I mean to be entirely polite; but, you see, it just couldn't have been the Pontormo! It just mustn't be—"

"Who let you in?" pursued Mrs. Bates-Smith. "Did you see people there?"

"No," faltered Sidony. "Oh, yes, yes! A man opened the door and didn't, and then another one did. He was a tourist. He wore golf stockings, and he showed me things—oh, please, Mrs. Bates-Smith!"

"Could it have been the son?" queried the diplomatic lady. "He's home from Oxford, I hear. His father had another stroke, and they took him up to their villa at Pegli yesterday."

"Sandro Cheriani?" pondered Mrs. Bates-Smith. "Well, I've heard he was more democratic. Still, he'd hardly—"

Sandro—Sand—Oxford — Rugby Sand!

The flame in Sidony's cheeks, which had been paling, flickered out entirely now, and, with it, the little tapers in her eyes. She tightened her hold upon the rim of the fountain and desperately flung out her last feeble defense.

"But he was fair, with gray eyes! He couldn't have been Italian!"

"There are two distinct types among the Genoese, dear." Mrs. Bates-Smith took up her embroidery. "Many of them are fair. Most of the Cheriani are. Yes, undoubtedly it was Sandro Cheriani himself who admitted you. Aha!" She glanced slyly at the diplomat's wife. "Youth! It sounds a bit romantic!"

"Oh! Oh!" moaned Sidony.

She sprang up and whirled from them. Her dress caught on Mrs. Bates-Smith's chair. She wrenched it loose, tearing it. She fled toward the staircase, followed by the deep voice of the diplomatic lady:

"Young—very intense—"

She didn't care! She didn't care how young anybody thought she was! She didn't care for anything now!

She was trembling. Her room was trembling. She threw herself across a trembling bed.

V

It was characteristic of Sidony that she sat up after a very little while, and, very straight on the edge of her chair, made herself think. She thought a great many swift little pieces of thoughts—thoughts which frayed and tangled into one another. They tangled before the background of the one big black realization—she had ruined her father's career in Genoa.

What storm would not this powerful, outraged Pontormo nobility pull about his head? Perhaps her blunder had changed the history of the sad, dying world! What was it her father had said?

"A single hour has changed many a chapter of history!"

And then the frayed wisps of thought, winding, winding into a chain that suffocated her! She had forced her way into a man's house, an unbidden guest, an unwanted guest. Worse than that, once inside, she had announced that she had come to take possession of it, the most aristocratic palace in Genoa. Worst of all, face to face with one of its members, she had openly criticized the family. She had openly criticized the head of the house himself. She had called the Duca di Pontormo a conundrum!

When twilight came, she put on the only black dress she had—a wispy thing that she hated. Clinging forlornly to the balustrade, she went down the wide staircase into the court. The weight of the world she had ruined dragged at her ankles and caused her to pause for a second on each step of the descent.

She did not join Mrs. Bates-Smith in the salon. She pressed herself as flat as she could behind a pillar in the corner of the court. It seemed to her that its cool marble throbbed hot the instant she laid her forehead against it.

The dinner chimes, as usual, disintegrated the clustering units of the throng, and sent them drifting in other combinations toward the dining salon. Maril's warm hand drew his daughter's icy one through his arm. Sidony opened her lips, and they stayed open, but it was because she could not have breathed otherwise.

Her father threw back his head with his characteristic brief laugh as he seated himself at their little table against the wall.

"There must be something in this notion of attracting things mentally." He unfolded his serviette. "Listen, pretty prim! You may possibly be interested in this. Did you notice that young man I just parted from, there at the door? That was Sandro Cheriani, come, like a noble Genoese, bearing gifts—which is, being interpreted, the Pontormo palace. Remember what we were talking about last night? But—is it too close in here? You look—"

Sidony's head weaved slowly to and fro. Her eyes implored him to continue.

"Well, I think that's about all there is of it. A pleasant surprise like that helps along wonderfully. It seems the old duke has placed all his affairs in the hands of this only son—a likable young chap. By the way, he has asked leave to call, so you'll meet him."

"Oh! Oh!" breathed Sidony.

Her eyes dropped shut for a moment, but only for a moment. Then they sprang open, very wide. She turned and stared speculatively across the room at Mrs. Bates-Smith, and beyond her at the secretarial lady, and beyond them both at the corner with the palms.

She believed she could do her hair high!

This world is really the most amazing and enchanting place!

ROADS

Oh, some roads are white with song,
And some with love are light—
The low lamps of crescent moons
And lips kissed at night.

Oh, some roads are white with song,
And some with silence black,
And some to watch with breathless voice
For footsteps coming back.

Oh, some roads are for the ear,
And some are for the eye,
And some to walk with breaking heart
Until the day you die.

Charles Divine

The Rules of the Game

IN AFFAIRS OF LOVE AND LIFE IT IS NOT ALWAYS EASY TO OBEY THEM

By L. M. Hussey

MARTIN HUBBARD filled out the brief forms, presented his personal check, and received, as its equivalent, a draft for one thousand pesos, drawn against the Caracas branch of his banking house.

The letter to Grace was already written. It was in Martin's pocket, the envelope still unsealed. It took only a few seconds to insert the draft and moisten the gummed flap with his tongue. A moment later he was on the street, hailing a taxi, in which he rode to the post office. There the letter was registered and dispatched.

He had no further business down town; but even this prompt fulfillment of Grace's request did not seem to complete his obligation. It had been accomplished too easily, and too impersonally.

Of course, he could have told himself that he was under no genuine obligation at all. Rot, that! No use to say that Grace had voluntarily, by her own act in marrying Delgado, gone out of his life. Others might say that, but not Martin. She was always with him, unforgettable!

When he reached his apartment, he was annoyed to find Herbert Laidy in the sitting room, recreating himself with a fragrant panetela. As a rule, it was agreeable enough to see Herbert, but on that particular afternoon Martin would have preferred to be alone. However, he shook hands cordially.

" Bodine said he expected you back any moment," Herbert explained.

" Yes, and I'm glad you waited, Herbert," Martin prevaricated. " Sit down again. Be comfortable."

" I will. I was comfortable, old boy. I'm always comfortable here in your sanctum. The books help to make me feel at home."

He swept an appreciative eye over the crowded bookcases that flanked him on both walls. Martin smiled ironically.

" Hard to understand that, Herbert. I don't believe you ever read a book in your life!"

" Of course not. I don't care to read 'em, but I like to look at 'em. They're decorative things."

" Well," said Martin, " you do better than I, then. As decorations, they don't waste much of your time; but I guess you find plenty of other useless occupations."

Herbert fixed his friend with an inquiring eye.

" You're a bit crabby, eh?" he asked.

" Yes, I am."

" Shake out of it!"

Martin frowned.

" I intend to."

" What do you mean?"

The money—that's all she had asked for—had been sent, but for more than an hour Martin had been grappling with his sense of unfulfilled liability. Then, at that precise moment, he made up his mind as to the next necessary step.

" I mean," he replied, " that I'm cutting out of this for a while, Herbert. In a few days, as soon as I can fix up the passport nuisance, I'm sailing for South America."

Herbert was exclamatory. What in the name of the saints, he asked, had Martin to do with the greaser republics? Was it to be Buenos Aires or Rio?

" Neither—Caracas."

Herbert Laidy raised his eyebrows and whistled softly. Meanwhile he stared at his friend.

" Yes," Martin admitted, " it has to do with Grace. I've reason to believe she's—in some pretty bad sort of a mess." He paused. " And what have I to do with that?" he continued, with sudden belligerence. "Everything!"

Herbert nodded thoughtfully.

"I suppose so," he remarked. "To a chap like you, Martin—everything. It's not the poets in this world that do the romantic things. They take it all out in talk. It's sober, solid-looking fellows like you that talk prose, but live in rimes."

"You can go to the devil!" said Martin sullenly.

Herbert Laidy was still nodding his head sagaciously.

"An incurably romantic character!" he proclaimed.

It was useless, Martin perceived, to explain to Herbert Laidy the reasons for his proposed journey. Herbert's airy mind would play with the weightiest urge as if it were a puffball. Moreover, the reasons weren't, after all, by any means clear to himself.

Martin never stopped to inquire whether he was a foolish man, a poor duffer, or even an ass—any of the pleasant names that others might fasten upon him in judgment. He knew only that in his desk was Grace's amazing letter, the first after three years, and he felt that it had placed him under a chivalric compulsion.

It was after Herbert was gone that he took out the letter and read it again. In what sort of shame, after what appalling agonies to her pride, had she written this? It was hard, terribly terse. That hardness and brevity, above everything else, revealed her emotional stress.

This was the letter:

DEAR MARTIN:

I think you can afford to do me a favor. I am in need of a thousand of our pesos, urgently. Can you send them to me? I'll repay you when I can, but I won't promise any definite time. The address is below. Don't cable. Cablegrams are so poorly handled here that the mails are more certain.

Nothing more, except her name scrawled beneath these lines.

Martin's old familiarity with the writing convinced him of its authenticity. Grace, impossible as it appeared, had really written him this distressing note—Grace, whose delicate but inflexible pride had been as characteristic of her as her small face, her eager, jetty eyes, accentuated by eyebrows orientally aslant, and the heaped abundance of her black hair. This abrupt little picture of her was to Martin a touching, piquant memory, darkened by the somber shadow of her unguessed trouble.

Martin's teeth momentarily tightened. Not entirely unguessed! He could imagine that her husband, that fellow Delgado, was the prime agent in whatever disaster had overtaken Grace. It made him smile grimly, in pain, when he recalled Herbert Laidy's recent words about himself:

"An incurably romantic character!"

It was because he had been too prosy, too unromantic, that he had lost Grace. A month before they were to be married she had met Delgado, and ten days later Martin received the news that his Grace was married to the poetic Hispano-American, and on her way to the tropics.

He folded up her letter and put it in his pocket. He called his man..

"Bodine, you're not busy?" he said, when the servant came into the room.

"I can do anything you want, sir."

"Then I want you to go down town to the Red D Line and reserve a passage for me on the next steamer sailing for La Guayra. Also, look into the red tape. Find out what I have to present—passport, vaccination certificate, and all that. I'm going to give you a vacation for a month or so, Bodine."

"Yes, sir."

"All right—jump now!"

Martin felt no longer the slightest hesitation as to his course. He questioned nothing. Knowing Grace as he did, recalling her old pride, there was no other fitting response to an appeal such as she had made. True, she had asked only for money, but that was not all. Her letter meant that she was in some dire need. It meant, above all, that she must be in need of him, of some strong and kindly hand, of the stanchness of old friendship.

II

Two weeks later, however, Martin felt his first touch of doubt, of trepidation, as he crossed the Plaza to the Avenida Este, in order to commandeer one of the blistered, dilapidated old coaches. He was about to visit Grace. As yet, she knew nothing of his presence in Caracas. He had learned her whereabouts after making inquiries at the American legation. There he had talked with the secretary to the American minister.

"I don't know much about Señora Delgado," Chapman, the secretary, had confessed. "I'm not sure that I've met her. She holds aloof."

"How about Delgado himself?" Martin inquired.

Chapman laughed a little sourly.

"I've heard of him."

"What have you heard?"

"Old Delgado," confided the secretary, "his father, died something more than two years ago. That wasn't very long after the son brought home his American wife. The old man left a sizable fortune. No—he was never a *politico*. Made it in coconuts and coffee. That son of his—he muddles a bit with the *politicos,* however. I've heard so."

"You're so damned cautious!" remarked Martin impatiently. "Why don't you tell me something?"

"My dear Mr. Hubbard, I have very little solid information to give you. We live in rumors, whispers around the corner. I've heard that young Señor Delgado is something of a—shall I say a bad actor? I don't know just how. Don't ask me. I think he has spent a lot of money. Now and then I've seen him breaking up glassware in the cafés. Most of the young chaps here do that sort of thing. He's present at all the turf events run off at the Hippodromo Nacional. He's a kind of sporting character. I don't know just how he's concerned with the national politics. Maybe not at all. If so, he's wise. That's a perilous game!"

It was just now, having come directly from his interview with the cautious Mr. Chapman, that Martin prepared to visit Grace. A dozen vociferous *cocheros* raged about him as he reached the file of waiting vehicles. He chose one, no less infirm than the rest, and found himself jolting over streets laid with uneven flags. The ancient springs creaked dismally under his weight. Thinking of Grace, however, he was oblivious to small discomforts.

In a few minutes, within a quarter of an hour, provided she was at home, they would meet again—after three years! What would be their first words? How would she receive him?

Naturally, he couldn't say that he had come specifically on account of her letter. She would guess that, no doubt. Furthermore, at the first meeting, they might not be alone. Delgado might be present.

Martin frowned. A fellow of Delgado's sort might easily resent the call he was about to make, however conventionally carried out and plausibly explained. For the first time, his trip, his sudden resolution to come here, appeared quixotic, irrational.

From the distance of another continent he had seen nothing but Grace's unknown trouble, her compelling difficulties, and these had provided an all-sufficient spur to action. Now, however, he felt that her troubles, however distressing, might well be too subtle for his mending. Perhaps he could play no more than the rôle of helpless spectator to her obscure distress.

The *cochero* drove past the somber barracks in Mamey a Dolores, and, turning west, crossed an iron bridge over a small river, and drew up in the square of Delicias. The houses here were small and squat, white-walled and desolate in a relentless sunlight. The streets were almost squalid. Martin was astonished, but the *cochero,* in abominable English, assured him that this was his destination.

"Las Delicias—*sí!*"

The numbers were painted on the heavy doors in black letters, the paint blistered by the sun. Two naked children, scrambling in the gutter, called after Martin as he mounted the cement steps of No. 38.

A slovenly mulatto girl responded, after considerable delay, to his knock. She opened a crack of the door, presenting her dusky face and a slender segment of the dim interior.

She was dubious about admitting Martin. She understood no English, of course, but he repeated the name of Señora Delgado. Then, properly inspired, he dropped a coin into a surprisingly ready palm. The mulatto girl smiled, opened the door, and stood aside.

The house was too small for either *patio* or corridor. He was admitted into a musty *sala* from which air and light were both excluded. On the few pieces of obviously uncared-for furniture, a fine dust, gritty to the touch, had collected. Martin waited, frowning.

"You—Martin!"

He had not heard her approach. She was standing in the doorway, almost luminous, vivid, Martin thought, in that dim rectangle. Her face looked very pale. He received the abrupt impression that she was taller than he had known her to be—an illusion, of course. She made no immediate effort to approach him.

"Grace—" he began.

His tongue stumbled over some necessary, conventional phrases. He swiftly cursed himself for his inability to say them. All the time he had been planning to meet her as casually as possible, unemotionally. An absurd idea!

"I had difficulty in finding you," he heard himself saying.

She came toward him now, and took his hand. Then, turning, she went to the window and pushed back the shutter. A swift projection of sunlight, startlingly vibrant and alive, entered the dead space of the room.

"You are the first visitor, Martin," she murmured, "whom I've ever received in this room, or in this house. We've been here three months."

He was still standing.

"Please sit down," she told him.

Suddenly Martin began to speak.

"Grace," he said, "I was going to lie to you. I can't. I'm a poor fellow at subtleties—brutal, I suppose; but you ought to remember me. I won't say, then, that I came to Caracas by accident, that I had business here. The only business I have here is to find out something about you. If I chose to make the trip for that purpose only, it's my own affair. I'm lucky enough to be able to go and come as I please. I simply couldn't ignore whatever difficulty you may be in. God knows, I wouldn't interfere under almost any other circumstances; but your letter—it gave me the right, didn't it?"

He saw that small face, pale as a night-blooming flower, lifted to his own — not helplessly, however, but chilly, remotely.

"Did it?" she asked.

In her simple question Martin experienced a congealing coldness. It was as if she had accused him of some breach of faith, some caddish act. He felt himself flushing under the sting of her icy words. He saw himself, abruptly, the victim of a deplorable folly. Slowly he arose.

"I didn't—" he began.

She was out of her chair in an instant, dramatically lithe. As she faced him, she seemed almost as tall as himself.

"Oh, forgive me!" she exclaimed. "I'm silly, silly—clinging to my poor pride! I've no right to be proud with you, Martin. The money came. I knew you wouldn't fail me. It doesn't even surprise me to see you here, Martin; but you can't do anything to help me."

Her tense body relaxed, and, drooping, she sank into the chair again.

"Isn't there anything to tell?" he asked.

"No use. It's—sordid."

"You won't let me hear, Grace?"

"You want to hear? It would be a sort of revenge for you to hear, Martin. For the sake of that, I'll tell you."

But before he could expostulate, deeply hurt by her implication, she erased her words.

"No, forgive me again! I know you so well, so well. You'd rather see me happy, wouldn't you, Martin—happy!"

Her low laughter, the broken sounds, cut like knives at the stagnant air.

"Maybe it's not fair," she began. "Maybe it's not playing the game according to the rules, to talk about him—especially to you. But to whom else, then? This is the first time I've talked. Never a word to another soul!"

She laughed again, less hysterically. How easily she had laughed in other days.

Concealing them at his sides, Martin Hubbard clenched his fists. He desired, terribly, instantly, to wipe all traces of distress, every defiling blot of obscure grief, from the life of this beautiful, beloved woman. Yes, beautiful, and still beloved! It mattered not what rules there might be in the game—he could at least admit that, tell that, to himself.

"I'll not try to explain," she was saying, "why I ran away with him, or why he made me—forget you. He was—impetuous. He gave me the promise of unbelievable romance, Martin. He was a mystery—do you understand?"

The man nodded slowly.

"I won't say that I wasn't happy in the beginning. It was gay here, Martin. They call Caracas 'the little Paris.' Ramon's father was alive then. A dear old man, poor Señor Delgado! He and I used to laugh together over Ramon when his friends brought him home tipsy from La India, or La Francia, or some other café."

She made a repugnant gesture with her slender hands.

"Why should I go on?" she demanded.

"It's well for me to know," he answered quietly.

"No, no! You can't do anything. I've no story to tell that you haven't heard a thousand times. Imagine it all for yourself—you must have imagination enough for that. When poor Señor Delgado died, Ramon began to spend. He spent—brilliantly! He never was lucky at the races—and he never cared. He has a sort of courage, my Ramon! He can laugh. Perhaps I might still have loved him, if there'd been no more than that."

She paused, but Hubbard understood without need of words. The *cochero,* in the drive from the Avenida Este, had brought him through some of those obscure, dubious streets where, Martin comprehended, a man like Ramon Delgado would go of nights, after the cafés were closed. Martin remembered that in passing he had heard the inappropriate twanging of a guitar, the lighter tinkle of a mandolin, and the unrestrained laughter of a woman.

He stared at Grace. It seemed incredible that her fragility had been exposed to such crude shames—cruder, even, than he had imagined. She was speaking again. Why not, she asked? Why shouldn't he know everything? Confession, they said, was appeasing to the heavy heart.

"My heart," she murmured, with appalling simplicity, "is very heavy!"

She told him of the visiting singer from Barcelona—a Catalonian, half French. Grace laughed again.

"It was a romantic attachment," she said.

The Catalonian left Caracas for Buenos Aires, wearing a necklace of black pearls—and then Ramon told his wife that he had sold their home.

"We came here, then," she explained. "Pretty poor quarters, aren't they? But then Ramon says that it's just as well the lack of money forces him to stay here for a while. He says that obscurity helps him just now."

"What does he mean?"

Martin saw that the woman was frowning, but at the same time he thought he detected a shadow of fear darkening her pale face.

"He has courage—didn't I tell you that? —gambler's courage, my Ramon. Sometimes I admire him for it. Don't you know what the supreme gamble is in a country like this—the sort of gambler's chance that such a man would be bound, sooner or later, to come to?"

A bit stupidly, Martin shook his head. As Grace explained, he noticed that her voice, as if in caution, had gone lower.

"Politics!" she whispered. "The fascinating gamble for power, old friend!"

A curious flush entered her cheeks. When she spoke again, it was with lowered eyes and an inexplicable sullenness about her lips. It was as if, abruptly, she almost despaired of Martin's comprehension.

"It began," she continued, "shortly after the—the Catalonian. There was still a little money left. Ramon organized his own group. I used to hear them talking about 'liberty' and 'the people.' I could see them watching one another cynically. There was a man named Vazquez who talked louder than the rest—louder than Ramon, even. When they were about ready, he revealed himself. He admitted very frankly that he was in the pay of our president. As yet he had made no report. That Vazquez—how cynically frank he was! He made it a question of economics. For a few thousand pesos he would go to the president and report that he could discover no political activities among this suspected group. Otherwise—

"'Here I am, *señores,*' he said. 'I am in your power, *caballeros.* If you decide to kill me, you will establish your own guilt. As wise men, you will hold my life very precious to you all!'"

Grace raised her eyes, meeting Martin's gaze. Her look was defiant.

"I suppose you won't understand, Martin. I don't care! He was my husband, and he came to me. It was a question of his life, and whatever shame I felt couldn't weigh against—a sense of duty. Yes, it was a sense of duty. You won't understand, but I felt it."

"No, no!" cried Martin, feeling vicariously all the shame she must have endured. "My poor Grace, I do understand; but I had no intention of mentioning it. You mean the money. It took courage for you to ask for that. You played the game. I knew it was some dire necessity!"

"Yes, Martin, it was a dire necessity, for Ramon. Perhaps I should have turned my back upon him then, refused, done nothing, asked nothing of any one — not even you! Would that have been the sensible course? I suppose so; but—I'm not sensible, then. For one thing, Martin, he promised that, helped out of his danger, rid of Vazquez, he would drop all that tormenting intrigue. Maybe I was a little selfish. Maybe I wanted to save myself, also."

"And of course," said Martin, "he never kept his promise?"

She smiled a scornful little smile.

"No, he didn't, Martin. The sacrifice, yours and mine, wasn't worth while. They've gone on. They made Vazquez, when he received what he asked, agree to leave the country. Now it's a rubber planter below Ciudad Bolivar who is supplying the funds. Ramon, I think, provides the plan. It's very simple. Ramon explains it when he's tipsy. They'll seize the governmental offices with a handful of men. They'll imprison the president, his staff, and most of the generals. Then, without fighting, the army comes over automatically. Martin, I'm afraid! Our president is very strong, and alert. There are others besides Vazquez. My Ramon is not lucky!"

Martin Hubbard sprang up abruptly.

"Intolerable!" he cried. "First he visits you with every possible shame, and now he exposes you to an intolerable danger! What reason, what sense is there in this, Grace? It's incredible to think of you as the center of some dirty, dime novel conspiracy! You've had enough of these people and this place. I say you *must* let me help you, Grace! It's your dire necessity now—your very own. You know me well enough to realize that for myself I'll demand nothing. After you're free of all this, you can put me out of your life again, if you want to, as you did three years ago. Grace, you must leave. You must go back to the States—alone, if you like—by the next steamer. You must wash your hands clean of all this hideous mess. I'll arrange everything—everything. I want you to put yourself in my hands."

He paused, but found her silent. A bitter note entered his voice when he spoke again.

"I know," he said, "what must have been your agonies in writing to me for money. I know you too well, Grace! It was more than a sense of duty. I realize the kind of compulsion such a man as Delgado would use. I can see that he forced you—forced you to ask for it. What a shocking humiliation!"

Grace was suddenly released from her apathy. Her head was raised and tilted backward, and her black eyes gleamed with inner fires.

"No!" she cried. "He forces me to nothing! I'm stronger than he! You don't understand! Martin, I'm playing the game—I've nerve enough for that. There was the gambler's spirit in me, too. I played for romance and happiness, and if I lost, I'll pay—pay with shame, if you like. I won't leave him, Martin! I'll see it through, to whatever end there is. You can't help. Why did you come here? You'd better go!"

He stared at her, trying to think of some compelling words, some persuasion that would save and liberate her. At that moment his long tenderness was vivified by a new admiration, an admiring conception of her foolish gallantry and courage. A gallant woman—and how intolerably he wanted her!

These two faced each other in the little *sala,* cut with that glinting diagonal of outer sunlight. Before either spoke again, a door opened and closed hastily, and a young man, slender, erect, with a thin face vividly alive, stepped into the room. Martin realized at once that he confronted Ramon Delgado. Grace was making a conventional presentation. The men did not shake hands.

For a few seconds Martin hesitated. Other than departure, no appropriate course suggested itself. He experienced a sense of terrible frustration. He bowed, murmured something incoherent to Grace, and was gone.

III

Young Delgado stood just within the door, looking at his wife with ironically lifted brows.

"Interesting!" he murmured. "Your old friend, my Gracia! I remember the name. He is—rather far from home. How many times has he met you here?"

Grace shrugged her shoulders. She resumed her abandoned chair.

Slowly, with something of a panther's gliding litheness, Ramon approached and stood over her. He bent toward her until his face was close to her own.

"Ah!" he whispered. "Have you been cleverer than I imagined? Was I a fool to think there was such a thing as an innocent woman?"

He laughed.

"You play your own little games, Gracia? I—"

His voice faltered, and with this faltering the touch of savagery died on his lips. Grace stared inflexibly at the farther wall. Resolutely she refused to reply to the enormity of his implication. Now it was the man who moved his thin shoulders in a shrug.

" At another time I'd be more—moved," he said.

His voice was almost lifeless. It startled Grace to see him seek a chair, into which he sank wearily.

" What do you mean?" she whispered.

" Be careful," he told her; " but go to the window. Keep in the shadow of the wall. Look out. By now there's probably somebody there—waiting."

With an instinct of abrupt fear, the woman hurried to the window, and glanced out. She turned to her husband with affrighted eyes.

" Who are they?" she asked.

" How many?" he inquired listlessly.

" Two men. One is staring at the house. The other is lounging near the curb."

Delgado smiled.

" They've been quick," he said. " A few more minutes, and they'd have overtaken me before I arrived here. Incautious, aren't they? From that window I could pot them easily." He sighed. " It wouldn't help. There are plenty of others."

With a few steps Grace was at his side. She grasped his arm.

" What is it?" she demanded. " Tell me, Ramon!"

" This morning," he answered, " our dear comrade, Robles, paid a visit to the president of the republic."

The woman's eyes were hugely dilated.

" You don't mean—"

" Certainly. Another one. Betrayed us—yes. Why not? He'll be paid. It's part of the game. Given the chance, I might have done it myself. Robles has won—like Vazquez. The rest of us—have lost."

Delgado began to laugh. His shoulders moved convulsively.

" Ah, Gracia, my little one, you're to be rid of me at last—rid of me at last, my jewel! Our president is a strong man. He won't bother with the prison. He'll stick to his last *pronunciamento* and order us all to be shot. A good thing—I prefer it. That's what he's sure to do, being an impatient man. A good end! Rid of me at last, Gracia! Your—what is his name?—your Martin is here. A good thing for you. He can step in, and they won't trouble you, for fear of international complications. How does it feel to be free, *mi amor?* How does it feel to know you have nothing more to endure from me?"

When he began to speak, she had listened intently, but his concluding sentences she did not seem to hear. He stared as she turned, hastily, and hurried from the room.

It was scarcely more than a few seconds before she came back. Her arms were burdened with women's things, including a black *mantilla* of heavy, almost impenetrable lace. Its fringed ends dragged across the floor.

" It's a chance," she said, speaking quickly. " A chance, Ramon! They're stupid fellows, those two. You must try now, before some one with authority and more sense arrives. Put on these things. With the *andaluza* thrown over your head, they won't be able to see your face. You can go out and pass them before their stupidity tells them to stop you. You can find some one to take you to La Guayra, and from there you can get to Trinidad. Later, when they come to search the house, they'll find no one but me. I will join you—when I hear—"

Ramon Delgado had arisen. He stared at his wife with a dark flush enlivening his cheeks.

" It might be possible," he muttered. " Maybe this is not the end!"

He met his wife's eyes.

" You have courage," he said. " You have more courage than myself. Why do you tell me to do this? Why don't you want me to be taken?"

She made no answer.

" Is it possible," he whispered, " that you still—love me?"

He saw her lips tighten.

" You want the truth?" she asked. " No—it has been a long time since I loved you, Ramon. Even love is reasonable. You know why I came here with you, to this city. I had dreams. I expected you to give me sweetness, sweet romance. You know what you've given me, Ramon. You know what you've been. Every possible shame—you've given me that! You've been drunken, silly, brutal, a spendthrift, a gambler—unfaithful. You gave me a final shame in asking money from Martin Hubbard. It seems impossible that I could ever have loved you. I know now that there was only one man in the world I ever loved!"

Ramon dropped his eyes. His hands made a faint gesture, an almost lifeless movement.

" I don't understand you," he said.

"No? You've very little time, now. Hurry! You've no time to try to understand me. Only this—I'll play to the end, Ramon! I'll stick to the last of the rules. I'll see it through. Can you understand that much?"

She picked up the tangled garments and thrust them into his arms.

"Hurry! Go into your room," she commanded. "Powder your face. Make it look white. When you go out of the house, walk slowly. It's a chance—a good chance!"

Mechanically he obeyed her. She was alone now. She could hear him moving about in the bedroom.

For an instant her head drooped, a weakness assailed her, and her resolution faltered. Why should she go on? The figure of Martin Hubbard arose before her eyes, stanch in his fidelity. In all this complex of obscure betrayals—Vazquez, Robles, and the other intriguers—why shouldn't she play a betraying part? A word whispered from the window, a softly opened door, and she would be free—free to find her lost happiness!

Then she raised her head and clenched her fingers into two small fists. She stood up; she ran quickly to the bedroom door.

"Hurry!" she cautioned.

Ramon emerged—but not in masquerade. As before, he was in his own clothes, his soft hat set over one ear.

"Good-by," he said.

"What do you mean!" she demanded.

She grasped his arm, but he shook off her clutching fingers.

"I'm tired," he said. "I've lost. I couldn't go through with it. A foolish scheme! Those fellows are not such idiots. I'd never even get started for La Guayra. Why should I make an ass of myself at the end? I've gambled—now I pay up the stakes. I'm glad our president is an impatient man. No rotten prison for me! The firing squad, in the old *cuartel* in Mamey a Dolores, and a few quick bullets. It wasn't in me to love you any better than I did, Gracia, my jewel. Wish it had been. A poor assortment, you and I. You'll find a better. *Adios!*"

He strode toward the outer door.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

"Bringing you the last shame," he answered, almost savagely. "Deserting you! You can't prevent me, can you?"

Before she could seize him, he opened the door, stepped out, and slammed it behind him. She ran toward it, fumbling desperately with the brazen knob. After what seemed an incredible time it yielded. She flung back the door and ran out.

The agents of the police had taken Ramon by either arm. It seemed that he was smiling.

IV

THE cry that rose to Grace's lips was suppressed in the fresh surprise of Martin Hubbard's sudden appearance. He came running from the corner, and in a second he was at her side. He had come back, rid of his sense of helplessness at last, to face Ramon Delgado, to demand of that youth some solution for Grace. He listened now to her swift words, almost incoherent, but sufficiently comprehensible to acquaint him with what had happened. Ramon and his captors had disappeared.

"Why did he do it?" asked Grace. "Of his own will? Why did he do it?"

"You're sorry?" asked Martin, in a low voice.

She stared.

"I don't know. I wanted—to play the whole game."

"You did all you could. Delgado was right. He did the only thing. He knew he had lost—the thing was hopeless. As he says, the president is an impatient man. A few hours now, and—after all, knowing that it was the end, your Ramon managed to put a touch of dignity into it!"

She grasped Martin's arm.

"I think so," she whispered. "Isn't it strange how easily we can forgive, after so much? In a few hours—he'll be gone, and I won't hate his memory. Strange, Martin—in his way, he might even have loved me!"

"I believe," said Martin slowly, "that in one way or another, no man in the world could resist loving you, Grace!"

He paused.

"How tired you look, poor child! What a nightmare for you! Come in. You can do nothing now. Later I'll go over to the *cuartel* and ask about—you understand. Let us go in and talk. Let us find out what we should do. Lean on my arm, Grace. Let me help you!"

He felt her drooping slenderness resting against him.

"You must help me," she whispered. "I'm ready to be helped now, Martin!"

A New England Night

WHAT BARRETT FOUND IN ARIZONA WHEN HE WENT THERE IN QUEST OF HEALTH

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

THOUGH it seemed a far cry from selling automobile accessories in a New England city to lying with a broken leg in an Arizona cañon, Barrett's present predicament might have been traced to the excellent sales that he and his partner had made the year before—eighty-three hundred dollars net to each of them. That made him put on more steam, concentrate harder, for he was twenty-eight, and his fixed ambition was to be making ten thousand a year by the time he was thirty. A little speeding up by day, a little more taken on at night, and the goal was in sight.

Then pneumonia, a dirty stab in the back, and the doctor's inexorable verdict that he must live in the open for a few years, must seek sunshine and avoid the dour New England winters and indoor work. As yet the trouble was threatened, not actual. He was lucky not to have developed an active tubercular condition, only a general run-down state—poor resistance, nerves shot to pieces. It sounded "lucky"!

There's always one friend to whom one can spill over with a hard luck story. Two would be a needless luxury. In Barrett's case, he turned to his lifelong friend, Chase-Dull-Care Carroll, whose happy temperament had fastened his nickname on him. Barrett had written to Chase, and Chase had wired a prodigal telegram urging him to come at once to visit him at the Arizona border post where he was stationed.

"Mountains, space, air, sunshine, *ad infinitum*," the message said. "You've only seen a pale variety of sunshine. Come along and meet the real article!"

The excellent price at which Barrett sold his share of the business made him realize all the more keenly the promise of its future. He was a man of few words and great capacity for work. To give it up made him feel as if he had suffered an amputation. He liked a tight, tidy office, furnace heat, and closed windows.

Perhaps his strongest sensation on reaching Arizona was that there was entirely too much outdoors in every direction. With all Chase's sunny optimism, he found it hard to lighten his friend's despondency.

It was the autumn tactical inspection, which meant that Chase was busy from reveille until retreat, so all he could do for Barrett was to leave him alone. The health seeker would lie for hours on a couch on the sunny porch, napping frequently, and then sleeping at night as he had not slept since he was a boy. Instead of a meal being a vexatious interruption in the busiest part of a day, it became an agreeable event, to which one looked forward and did ample justice. As the striker put it deferentially to Chase, a month later:

"The captain don't need to bother about trying to shoot quail for Mr. Barrett. He does very well by ham and eggs or a porterhouse, sir."

At first Barrett had felt too homesick for the purr of a high-powered car to accept Chase's invitation to use the Tin Camel as he liked.

"It's the only car with a gait," explained Chase breezily. "Has a gait exactly like a camel's, and makes a noise like a riot at a tinware auction!"

But when Barrett began to go out for frequent rides alone, the more he saw of the country, the more he felt the spell of its curious fascination, its austere beauty. He heard of a ranch which was offered for sale, and he decided to go to look at it. He told Chase that he would probably go on to Nogales and spend the night there.

He was so much pleased with his inspection of the ranch, so sure that it was a good buy at the figure named, and that with more capital invested in it there were big possibilities of development, that instead of going on to Nogales he had turned back to talk over the new venture with Chase.

Where all the roads looked so much alike, he had somehow made a wrong turn. As the way ahead grew steadily more rocky and difficult, he had climbed a hill to get his bearings. A still higher peak cut off the view, and he had started up its side when he had slipped on the loose rocks and fallen. When he had tried to crawl, to drag himself along the ground, covered with rocks, cactus, and every variety of *espiñas,* the intense pain in his leg made him fear that he would faint. At all hazards he must stay conscious.

He pulled out his watch again. An hour and forty minutes since he had slipped on the rocks—only that! He would see how long he could keep from looking at it again.

II

PERHAPS another hour had passed before Barrett heard the most musical and most welcome sound that had ever reached his ears—the sound of a human step, light but near.

He hallooed loudly. A boy with a gun appeared over the slope, stood still, and pointed the gun straight at him.

"Stop that, you young idiot!" shouted Barrett. "It might go off!"

"It *will* go off if you come a foot nearer," returned the owner of the gun coolly.

He saw that she was a girl, though the first glimpse of her, with her slouch hat, khaki breeches, dusty laced boots, and short bobbed hair, had for a moment led him to mistake her. Her khaki hunting coat, with its stained shoulder pad of sheepskin, hung slightly open, disclosing her cartridge vest with its rows of shells.

"I beg your pardon," said Barrett. "I thought you were a boy, from your somewhat casual manner of handling firearms. If I may again call attention to it, your gun is pointed straight at me. I have broken my leg stumbling on these d—— I mean these loose rocks. If you will help me to my car, or go to the army post with a message for me, I will pay you handsomely for your trouble."

The young woman's gun had never swerved an inch.

"How do I know you've broken your leg?" she demanded.

In the entire course of his twenty-eight years, Barrett had never lost his temper so completely.

"How do you know? Because I tell you so, and I am not a liar! Nor am I a fool, to be sprawling in the midst of rocks and spikes and thorns for pure pleasure!"

"You may be pretending to be hurt, for all I know, and for all you've proved," returned the girl bluntly. "Very well—I'll take a chance on it. I'll send you help from our ranch, which is near. The post is thirty miles from here."

She backed off a few paces. Her tanned face was as stern as a young Diana's.

"If I hear a sound of your following me, I'll turn and shoot. I am a good shot. You have been warned, remember!"

"The damned little fool still doesn't believe my leg is broken," thought Barrett furiously.

It was intolerable to the city-bred man, it was more than flesh and blood could bear, to be left alone in that isolated cañon as the shadows lengthened. His voice sounded sharp and edged as he called after her:

"Come back! For God's sake don't leave me here! See, I'll stand up, to show you I can't!"

He made a desperate, absurd effort to stand on his one good leg, toppled over, and fell face downward. The faint he had dreaded became actual, although there was but a momentary loss of consciousness. However, he had convinced the girl, and she hurried to his aid. She took charge of the situation.

"It's getting late, and darkness falls quickly here. Put your arm around my shoulder. Use me as a crutch, you see. That's it! Hop. Hurts much? You're doing all right, but lean harder, and throw more weight on me. That's better! Rest. We'll have to rest every few minutes. Ready?"

So on—an interminable progress to the Tin Camel. Barrett was nearly exhausted, nearly spent, as she helped him into it.

"Now I'll have to go back to unloose my horse. It's not very far. I'll unsaddle him, and he'll find his way back to the ranch."

It seemed a long time to Barrett before he heard her light, quick step again. The car rattled and banged along the rocky road—the stony gully might be called a road as a matter of courtesy—and presently swung into the highway. Once the girl stopped the car to examine the track of a heavy tire. Her face was grave and troubled, but she said nothing.

As they turned in at a cattle guard and neared a long, low adobe house, she spoke for the first time.

" This is our ranch," she said. " I'll go in and send my brother Jim to help you, in case you would like to rest a little before he takes you on to the post."

A few minutes later she came back alone. All the spring seemed gone from her.

" Jim isn't here. There's nobody but me. Ours is a one-man ranch, and the cowboys are only here for a round-up. I'll have to help you as I did before. Ease down, like that. Lean hard!"

They managed the slow and painful steps into the house. She assisted him to a couch and made him lie down.

" The first thing to do now is to get off your shoe and let me examine the place."

He rebelled violently.

" I prefer for that to wait until I can get to the post, to see the surgeon there."

Her eyes met his so soberly that he felt a chill of apprehension.

" I can't take you to the post to-night. It's over thirty miles from here—a bad ride at night, over rough roads, and with an injured man. It would be a risk to take you, even if I dared to leave the ranch, and I don't dare. I might come back to find it burned to the ground. All Jim's hard work—" She stopped short. " I can make a splint for your leg. Jim's was broken once, and I looked after him. Once I set a dog's leg."

A dog's leg! One might have choked such a girl with a right good will!

She removed his shoe and sock, and examined the swollen and purpling ankle with deft fingers.

" That's better than I hoped for. The smaller bone of the leg is broken above the ankle, so the big bone will act as a natural splint. I'm going to get a clean shingle and some bandages, and fix it up for to-night. To-morrow I can take you back to the post."

He watched her firm, capable hands as she put on the bandage, as skillfully and as impersonal as—as a veterinarian, he told himself.

" Now I must get you something to eat in a hurry. An omelette and some coffee?"

It was quickly made and brought to him where he lay. The chill of lying so long on the ground had permeated to the bone and marrow. The hot, strong coffee gave him a new grip on himself.

" I—I have not thanked you," he began. The sudden consciousness of how he had failed in appreciation made him stiff and awkward. " I must have seemed horribly ungrateful!"

The girl considered it, her eyes fixed straight on his. They were as clear as brown topazes. Her brother always said that they were the color of a mountain lion's.

" Ungrateful? *Grouchy*, I'd say," she made frank rejoinder. " I suppose an Eastern man would naturally feel that way about an accident."

He could not repress the rejoinder:

" I suppose a Westerner would feel quite merry over a trifle like a broken leg!"

" He might feel glad it wasn't his neck," the girl returned easily. " One runs across a lot of accidents out here, and gets used to them."

" I have heard rumors of an occasional automobile accident east of the Mississippi," he said.

Her face lighted delightfully with her rather rare smile.

" Aren't Easterners funny? You won't even admit there could be more accidents out here! After all, I imagine there's very little difference between one part of the country and another," she said thoughtfully. " People are just folks wherever they chance to live, and so about the same things must happen to them."

It was his turn to smile.

" What a typical New England night we're having!"

She picked up a soft blanket and threw it over him.

" Will you try to go to sleep, since you feel so much at home?"

" At eight o'clock?" he fumed.

She made a sudden restless movement. To any one who knew her, it would have showed the nervous tension she was under, for she was accustomed to hold herself in steady control.

" You need sleep," she soothed, as if to an unreasonable child. " But talk, if you prefer."

So he asked the question uppermost in his mind:

" Is it possible that you are accustomed to stay alone at this isolated ranch?"

" No, of course not. I live here with my brother Jim. He married a year ago. Celia was a great friend of mine at school, and came out here to visit me. I went East to school—to Austin."

East to Texas!

" When I came in to-night, I found a note saying that Celia had been taken ill suddenly, and Jim was afraid it might be appendicitis, so he had hurried her off in the car to the hospital at Bisbee. Jim naturally thought I'd be quite safe here to-night, as nobody would know I was here alone. I'll sit here by the fire awhile. Let me know if you need anything."

Food and warmth had given Barrett a sense of drowsiness which was bliss after the pain and chill.

" You've always lived here? You like this country?"

" Like it! Why, I don't see how people stand living in cities! It would smother me to death. Every time I was on my way back from Austin—"

" The East," he corrected teasingly.

" I'd stay on the rear platform of the observation car all the time, recognizing my friends—mesquite waving to me, yuccas in bloom again, and century plants. Even the old gray sagebrush would seem as friendly as one's grandfather! I'd feel like calling to the tumbleweed, ' You little tramp, where are you blowing to now?' Or saying, ' Hello there, you fat barrel cactus!' "

The cactus was swelling, was growing bigger and bigger, was bursting open, and it was filled with warm air and funny butterflies. Barrett was sound asleep.

III

He was awakened by a touch on his arm. He opened his eyes sleepily, and for a moment could not place himself in the low-raftered room, which somehow had an atmosphere of charm and home. Then he remembered. He was aware of a stabbing pain in his leg, and saw, to his amazement, that the girl was sitting before the fire, with her rifle across her lap. His sleepiness evaporated as if by magic, and he was wide awake.

" Listen!" She spoke in a low, concentrated tone. " I wanted you to get some sleep the first part of the night, so I didn't tell you we were in danger. I hated to arouse you, but I don't dare wait any longer. There's a man, Dick Bent, who owns a small copper mine just on the other side of the border. He has been going back and forth across the border, smuggling tequila and mescal. He had a false bottom to his wagon, and put the stuff under the false bottom, with a load of ore on top. Nobody bothered to unload all the heavy ore, and he has been getting across with it for a year or more, making money hand over fist. He bought a big car and all that. Maybe the custom officials finally realized that he couldn't be making so much money out of low-grade ore, or maybe somebody informed on him; but anyhow, he was caught red-handed with the goods. He got off with a short sentence and a heavy fine. My brother had nothing to do with it, but Dick Bent believes it was Jim who informed on him. He swore that he'd get even with Jim when he got out of jail, if he had to burn the ranch down, and that he'd pay *me* back at the same time. He is a university graduate, and they say that he belongs to an old Maryland family, though he doesn't use the name, and that he drifted down to the border and went to the bad, drinking tequila and mescal. You know they say that if a man gets accustomed to tequila, it makes whisky taste like vanilla custard. His term must be out, for he has been here this afternoon; so he must know that Celia and Jim are away. First I saw that track in the road, which I thought was his big car, and then I saw his footprints in the 'dobe mud just this side of the cattle guard. I'd know his footprints anywhere—a narrow boot, no hobnails, and a long stride. He's handsome in an odd way, with his thick black hair and slanting gray eyes, and he's vain of it."

" Surprising in a man like that," suggested Barrett, trying to assume a casualness which he was far from feeling.

She considered it. She had a way of turning over a matter mentally before she expressed her opinion.

" No, I think not. I've known a few ' bad men,' as they are called. All of them were vain in one way or another. All of them boasted about something, whether it was the men they had killed, or the amount of liquor they could drink, or the women who were crazy over them. There was always a brag somewhere."

" And this man's?"

" Women. He thinks they all fall for him. He kept dogging me to marry him until Jim told him not to come around the ranch any more. When he was caught bootlegging, and thought Jim had informed on him, he swore that he'd burn down this place as soon as he got out of jail, and that —that he'd have me in Mexico, begging him to marry me. He's a dead shot, lots better than I am. I'm pretty fair at game, but I've never shot at a person in my life, and of course it makes a difference. What sort of a shot are you?"

"I have never fired a gun in my life," returned the city man apologetically. "In my part of New England, hunting is a rich man's sport."

"Then will you do just exactly as I tell you? I've been doing a lot of thinking while you were asleep."

She propped up the pillows of Barrett's couch.

"Sit up and let me throw the blanket across your injured foot. You see, he must not guess that you are hurt. Take this pistol, and hold it so—see? But don't pull the trigger under any circumstances, unless I tell you. No, don't grip it as if it were trying to wriggle out of your hand. Hold it naturally."

Her face rippled with mirth.

"You don't have to press your lips tight together to hold a pistol. You look so—so *determined!*"

"That's an improvement over being grouchy," he reminded her.

She moved her footstool close to the couch and sat down, leaning slightly against his knee, but with her rifle across her lap.

"Now we're ready for him, though he's not likely to come until it's late enough for him not to meet anybody on the road out here. Don't you do anything or say anything. If you talk, you'll give him an opening. It's silent folks he doesn't understand. I'm going to pretend that you are my husband, that I married you in Austin, and that you've just turned up again. Then there will be two influences at work on him, unless he has been drinking too hard—he's a Catholic, and still has a sort of respect for marriage buried deep in him; and he's vain, and wouldn't want you to know that he wanted me himself."

"And if he has been drinking hard?" asked Barrett quietly.

He saw her control a shiver.

"Then I may have to shoot, but not until I've tried everything else. If there's shooting, he will get one of us, probably both. If he thought you were—were with me, and *not* my husband, he'd get you. I wish I had left you in the cañon, where you would have been out of danger!"

"I am glad you didn't," he said with decision. "Don't be unhappy. Maybe he won't come."

She waited a long moment.

"He's outside," she whispered, her trained ear hearing stealthy sounds which Barrett could not detect.

She raised her voice a little. It sounded clear, contented, domestic.

"But Pete, turkeys do wonderfully well in Arizona," she said. "Why, they feed themselves on the grasshoppers, and even if coyotes got a few, it certainly would pay us to keep a—"

The door swung open.

A man stood there — rather a dandy, with his knotted handkerchief around his sunburnt throat, his polished black cowboy boots with the scalloped tops, his long silver spurs, his ivory and silver forty-five glistening in its holster. When he saw Barrett, for a moment his glance swerved in sheer astonishment, and his hand rested lightly on his hip.

"So there is a man to whom you aren't so damned particular?"

She did not lift her rifle. She looked fearlessly into Dick Bent's eyes.

"Meet my husband, Dick! You want to see Jim? He and Celia have gone to Bisbee. She's sick."

Her tone was neither conciliatory nor defiant—merely matter-of-fact.

"Husband!"

Dick Bent's sneer was contemptuous and threatening.

"I married him when I was in Austin, but I never did tell Jim. We didn't get on well together—he was so grouchy; but now he's come back, and I thought maybe we could make a start with turkeys. Know anybody who has some to sell?"

Dick was not drinking. To the contrary, he was cold sober. He had planned a long drive into Mexico, and he wanted to keep his head clear, for he had not meant to go alone. Somehow it didn't seem plausible to abduct a girl who was simply wishing to buy some turkeys, nor to shoot at the gaping dumb-bell she had married.

He looked Barrett over insolently with his slanting eyes.

"If I ever saw a buzzard with a white liver, it's the choice object you're tied up with! Sell him turkeys? Why, a young turkey would freeze to death looking at that frozen face! You don't seem to trust each other a damned sight, each of you swinging to his gun. Put 'em up!" he commanded harshly.

Barrett, struggling to maintain his self-control, pulled the trigger of his pistol unaware. It seemed to him that it went off with a deafening noise. For a moment he felt that he must have killed both girl and intruder with one fell shot. From an immeasurable distance he heard her chiding:

"Pete, don't you do that again! He was just trying to show off to you, Dick, that he could pick the flower out of that china vase on the mantel."

No less surprising to the girl than the report of the pistol had been to the man was the sound of a burst of laughter.

"Showing off his gunfire to me! Shot the hell out of a vase, did he? Why, that bimbo couldn't hit a bull with a bass fiddle! When his pistol went off, and he nearly jumped out of his skin, and flung his arm straight up in the air, I suppose he was aiming at a fly on the ceiling! Maybe he was shooting a feather from an angel's wing! And to think of you falling for a gun-shy deaf mute!"

The girl seized the advantage of his mood of laughter, sardonic though it was.

"Dick, you thought Jim peached on you. On my word of honor he didn't. Jim's no sneak." She played her last card. "Besides, it would have been low in Jim to tell on you when you wanted to marry his sister."

"*I* wanted to marry you!" he cried, outraged, stung. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last skirt in the world! The sort of man you want is this hencoop helper that you picked up riding the zebra in a merry-go-round!"

As he turned to Barrett, the veneer of the later years seemed to drop from him. For a moment there flashed a glimpse of the proud arrogance of his youth.

"My congratulations, Grouch! You'll find this fair *señorita* as sexless as a sycamore sapling! When *I* choose a woman, she won't spend the first evening she has been with me in a year discussing the economics of poultry raising!"

Still resting his hand lightly on his hip, he backed out of the door into the night. Presently they heard the purr of his car, headed toward Mexico.

IV

The girl's whole body was shaken by a violent fit of trembling.

"Thank God I didn't have to shoot! I'd rather die than kill anybody; and if he had shot you, I should have felt like a murderer."

Involuntarily, because it seemed the most natural thing in the entire universe, Barrett put his arm around her quivering body.

"You've been through everything, dear! You're the most wonderful girl I ever saw in my life—the bravest, the best sport. You could teach a man to love this country, to find his place in it, to do a man's work here. You are so fine and so true—"

"True?" she cried. "True, when I lied like that? And I've always prided myself on telling the straight truth."

"Please God, part of what you said was a prophecy, not a lie. You must go to sleep now. It's striking midnight, and—"

To his extreme annoyance, his speech was cut short by a sneeze.

She spoke without considering it.

"I wonder which day it is when the clock is striking midnight! You know the old saying:

> "Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for danger;
> Sneeze on Tuesday, kiss a stranger.

"You've already had the danger—"

She broke off, and a warm flush stole under her tan. He bent over her, and somewhere against the brown bobbed hair there passed the breath of a kiss.

"But you're not a stranger!" His voice was ringing, triumphant. "I'll know you better than I know any girl in the world—as soon as you tell me your name!"

His own name seemed to be immaterial, for the girl he married six months later always called him "Pete."

HEART'S DESIRE

At dawn, or with the burnished sun at noon,
Some grasp the guerdon whereto they aspire;
But give me twilight and the round, low moon
And love—and lo, I have my heart's desire!

Clinton Scollard

The Synagogue

A STORY OF TWO GENERATIONS OF AMERICAN JUDAISM

By Myron Brinig

IN one week, the town of Silver Bow was born. A young prospector, driving a pack mule across the mountain wilds of Montana, came in sight of a deep gulch that almost split the backbone of the country in twain. The brilliant sun gave the earth a glittering scrutiny, as if conscious of the fact that untold wealth lay hidden away within the locked chest of the land. This prospector had experienced his share of hard times. His worldly goods had all been spent, and he had buried an only child in the violently beautiful place that was later to become the Yellowstone.

"We'll start all over again here," he grimly told his sad-eyed wife.

In a day he had staked his claim. Within the week, wild tales circulated concerning the discovery of silver and copper deposits in a heretofore unheard of place, some four hundred miles north of the Mormon settlement. Silver Bow stretched out its shimmering arms in birth. It was a boom town.

The new magnet drew all classes irresistibly. It drew Moses Mendel, rabbi, and his young wife, Rebecca, from congested Grand Street, in Manhattan. They rode for a whole week across the prairies in the new and proud Northern Pacific trains, and were welcomed with thanksgiving by the Jews of Silver Bow.

"Welcome, chazan, rabbi!" they greeted him.

To a man, they set about building a synagogue on East Silver Street. There, in a wilderness of slag heaps and patches of green copper water, they raised a house of worship to Jehovah, and the holy Torah, bearing the sacred words, was set in its place above the altar.

There were only fifteen Jews in Silver Bow at this time, and one of them was looked on askance, because rumor had connected him with the "restricted district" on East Galena Street; but the religion of the ages must be carried on, synagogues must be built, children must be taught the law. Therefore even the dubious one was put to work tacking down carpet in the aisle. He wept on the floor and confessed his sins, and the girls he had imported from San Francisco were sent back on the train.

"Ah!" sighed Rebecca Mendel, after she had blessed the lights for the first time since arriving in Montana. "No more happiness for us in this world, Moses! To a wild place you come, where the Indians will maybe murder us in our beds, and where even the Jewish people are like gentiles. *Finster is mir!* Dark is my life!"

But Moses Mendel's enthusiasm was not clouded by hardships and Indians, and he laughed off his wife's fears.

"Look, Becky!" he said, pointing to the synagogue, now almost completed in the very shadow of the Rockies. "Where you seen anything so fine like that? A new synagogue! Like when Moses did hear the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, and came down to his tribes and cried, 'The law! The law!' All my people helped build this *schule,* and I will bring our religion to them, and they will be comforted. It's like I am on fire with it—my religion! It burns me so I want to fall on my knees and cry out, 'I come, O God, I come!' Before there was mountains, before there was yet silver and copper under the ground, there was one God, the true God! See, Becky, *meine liebe,* He brought us here to sing and pray to Him. It was all thought out for us. Now commences a new congregation where the heart is yet clean and strong!"

The synagogue was completed, a tabernacle of stone in a wilderness of gray flats and bronze gulches. The Friday after the last bench had been put in place, the small but intense congregation gathered within, each man with a prayer shawl draped over his shoulders, and a large golden-brown prayer book in hand.

The prayer shawl, with its horizontal stripes of blue or purple, testifying that "the Lord is one," was as yet unwrinkled. As was the custom, the prayer book was also used as a drum, against which the palm of the hand was slapped, demanding silence.

Fifteen of the faithful prayed so intensely that their bodies moved in a swaying rhythm, forward, then back, and forward again. The rich voices lingered over the Hebrew script as if each accent were an opal reflecting a thousand lights and nuances of feeling. In front of the altar, his frame shapeless under the flowing prayer shawl, a skull cap fixed on his head, Moses chanted deep, haunting melodies that flooded the heart and fired the senses.

The women prayed meekly, as if, through lack of equal strength, they were unable to mount to the peaks of spiritual exaltation attained by the men. The few children looked on at the strange ceremonies with eyes grown great beyond all experience and understanding.

The only light was that thrown by tall white candles, which stood in the dusky corners like emaciated white saints crowned by orange and blue flames. In the reflected glow, the forms of the congregation were dim and ethereal, now plunged into shadowy caves, now upright again, ghosts hastily sprung back from a mysterious crusade into darkness.

In the very beginning, when man first materialized on the earth, the beasts must have stood apart and mocked at the strange creatures, fantastic and unearthly. So when the first synagogue in Silver Bow was filled with voices, the prospectors stood by and grinned wonderingly at this unfamiliar display of worship. It was a long-forgotten voice crying out of a medieval past into a crude and bubbling present, infusing the brazen furnace of a pioneer community with the rich, stained glamour of an old tradition.

There were not a few rude remarks and malicious sallies; but the worshipers chanted on with undiminished ardor. The synagogue was already deep in the lives of its people, a monument unmoving, ever young, and yet as old as the million nights since Abraham.

The synagogue was firmly established, and in conjunction with it Moses had started his kosher butcher shop. Every Wednesday, when the car of live stock reached Silver Bow, Moses was there, prepared to slaughter cattle in the true way, so that the sacrifice might be acceptable in the eyes of Jehovah.

"Blessed art Thou who sanctified us with Thy commandments, and commanded us concerning slaughtering."

Moses had purchased a horse, which he drove to the stockyard; and after the cattle had been killed, he loaded their carcasses into a wagon and brought them to the shop. It was mercilessly hard work, this part of his duty, and Rebecca had to help dress the beef; but it was the law. Otherwise the orthodox would have been compelled to eat of flesh shot dead by gentiles, and unblessed.

There was also the labor of killing chickens on Saturday, after sundown. The law forbade the killing of winged creatures by the ax. Moses clutched the birds by their wings, murmured a prayer, and then, in the manner prescribed, sliced their throats with a blade sharpened to the fineness of a thread. The shop was filled with flutterings and drifts of softness, and feathers covered everything in it, like tools in a farmyard buried under drifts of December snow.

No work was done from Friday to Saturday sundown. It was *shabbas*, the day of rest. When it was winter, and the frost made the door knobs burn to the touch, Rebecca and Moses did not even light the fires in the stoves over the holy day, but called in neighboring gentile boys to apply their matches to the paper.

With the coming of night on Saturday, the rush and furor commenced again. The shop was clogged by children grasping restless chickens in their arms. Behind the counter, Rebecca was kept busy sawing and slicing desirable portions of beef for the discriminating shoppers. It was a vivid, exciting life that Moses and Rebecca brought with them to Montana—a life of golden prayer in the synagogue, and a perpetual routine of butchering in the shop.

For many weeks past Rebecca had been heavy with child. One Saturday, after the last shopper had departed, laden with purchases and talked out of gossip, Moses saw his wife faint away over the counter. He was alarmed, and carried her into the back room.

"Becky, my sweet wife!" he cried, in tears. "What has happened that you do not speak to me? What is it, my loved one? Oh, that I should make you to work so hard! God will never forgive me! He is a great and stern God, and He will punish me!"

The doctor was immediately sent for, and early on Sunday morning Sollie was born. He was one of the first of his race to salute with lusty wails the gigantic Montana scene, the sharp, blue skies and the rugged mountains. He was named after Solomon of old, the illustrious one, the wise one—how wise!

Chariots with wheels of solid gold, rare silks and burning jewels, surrounded Solomon in the days of his pinnacled glory. Sollie's blanket was thin and cheap, and his little dress was of coarse cotton. Temples with aspiring domes, and palaces whose long aisles hung in a mist of sweet, sensuous perfumes, were Solomon's glory throughout the crimson and gold days of his reign; but Sollie came to Silver Bow when streets were rutted trails, and prospectors still slumbered under the open sky.

How fine it is to have a son!

"He should be like Abraham Lincoln," crooned Rebecca over her baby.

"I will make a rabbi of him," said Moses.

Sollie was restless, and climbed eagerly over his mother's breast; but his cruelty of movement filled her with satisfaction and thrilling content. The Queen of Sheba had her Solomon, great and wise; and Rebecca Mendel had her Sollie, so small, yet so beloved! He kicked his sturdy legs against his mother's breast, and they hurt her, but Rebecca throbbed with the blissful pain.

When it came time for the function of making a Jew out of Sollie through the ancient custom of circumcision, Moses could hardly bear to cause his son any hurt. He was almost sorry that Sollie was not a girl, for the operation was a painful one.

In the room adjoining, Rebecca, propped up against pillows, cried when she heard the child wailing out its distress. So often had Rebecca heard that wail without flinching! Then it had been the law; but now it was her baby, part of herself, meeting his first knife at the hands of the world.

The ceremony was lived through somehow, and after an hour, when Sollie was sleeping peacefully, Moses entertained his friends with cakes and wine. There was laughter, and great merrymaking, and in Rebecca's room were many fine presents.

"*Mozeltof!*" every one said, to wish the child a long life.

Two years later there was a girl, and they called her Ruth—"friend."

"*Nu!*" Rebecca said to her well wishers. "A boy is a comfort in the house, but Ruth, she rests easy on my heart."

"I will bring them up in the synagogue," said Moses, "and they will carry on the ancient law."

II

SILVER Bow was a town of deep cavities, into which were lowered men who dug, with the sweat of their bodies, for copper, and still more copper. A Main Street had cleared the way from Big Butte Hill to the very base of the Rockies. Here the wares of merchants seduced the eyes of the miners, and saloons made merry hells out of the tingling, altitudinous nights.

The pioneers were vanishing. In their youth, a traveling tent show, with a famous Polish actress as star, had drawn from them a blizzard of gold pieces and wild hurrahs. *Madame* had been raised off the stage, and had fainted divinely from the excitement; but that was long ago. Now the grandsons of the pioneers twisted and wriggled to the jazz melodies of eccentric bands.

The richest copper hill in the world changed subtly. Old shafts were abandoned, and new gallows frames lifted their glinting towers into the sky. On the South Side a great smelter had made its appearance, and all night the stars drifted wanly through heavens dyed a rubescent red. They were passing, the pioneers; many had moved to California, where the climate was "better for the lungs."

Moses was white now, and his beard covered his breast like a cloak of ermine. He looked a symbol of his race as he moved about his unrelenting duties, quivering in his step, but still consumed with the blaze that shone fiercely from his eyes.

Rebecca's hands had grown huge and red from much sawing and cutting of meat. In the old days these same hands had been white butterflies hovering over and blessing the orange and blue candle flames.

Their children were grown. Sollie was a nervous, high-strung young man with a keen eye for "opportunities." Moses had long since buried any hopes of making his son a rabbi. The girl, Ruth, moved in the socially elect West Side set, and was seen about with gentiles. Her hair was black as jet, and her eyes moved young men into strange, troubled dreams.

The camp had become a town. Office buildings were beginning to look out of golden glass eyes straight to the tops of the Rockies. The roughness of the early days was greatly diluted. There was at work a systematic routine piling up wealth into millions. Rotary clubs flourished, and real estate men advertised new additions close by the car lines, with all the modern improvements.

In the synagogue, however, ceaselessly swaying figures prayed on, and continued to slap their palms against glazed prayer books. The shophar, or ram's horn, was still blown on the Day of Atonement, recalling men from the eternal, grinding wheel of toil to an exaltation of the spirit.

Sollie did not hear the shophar.

" Papa, I got a good chance to go into business. If I put two thousand dollars into this deal, I'm on the way to being a rich man!"

" Money! Money!" cried Moses, putting aside the Jewish newspaper that he received daily from New York. " All my life I wanted you to be a rabbi, to step into my place when they bury me. When you was a boy, didn't I make you to read Hebrew? And when you was run away from Sabbath school, I gave it to you such lickings! And all for what? That you should come to me with talk on business, and no thoughts from higher things? All my life I say, ' Sollie, study hard, and maybe some day you will be a *ruf,* a learned man, so that your race will look up to you!' And now you talk from nothing but business, business! *Oi, geweh!*"

" And Ruth, she ain't no better, neither," interposed the mother, pausing in her efforts to thread a needle.

It seemed as if Rebecca's hands were never still. When it wasn't housework, it was butchering; and in between whiles, it was sewing ceaselessly, inserting and drawing a needle through stuffs and stuffs and stuffs. Poor old fingers, so mutilated now, so scarred!

" Do you think maybe Ruth would spend a minute in the house, helping her mamma? It's always shows and dances and new fellers. Papa, the new generation is different from what we used to was. Pretty soon there won't be Jews, and nobody will build synagogues. All peoples will be the same!"

His mother's views did not seem to disturb Sollie. His thoughts were far removed from speculation about religion. All his movements were quick, spasmodic, and in his eyes schemes unfolded themselves and glittered narrowly.

" Mamma, you don't understand," he interrupted with a *moue* of impatience. " The world's changing nowadays. It used to be, when you and papa was young, that religion was the whole show. You breathed it and ate it three times a day; but now, if you don't go out and rake in the dough, you're finished, and finished quick! It's financial position that makes the man of to-day. That's why I want to get in on the ground floor. I got a chance to clean up a fortune, if papa will only lend me a couple of thousand dollars."

Rebecca's thoughts were elsewhere.

" So many nice Jewish boys what they are in Silver Bow, and Ruthie goes out with gentiles! *Nu,* if only my father was living yet, he would show her what's right with a strap!" She nodded her head sadly. " A fine thing it is for a rabbi when his daughter goes out to gentile dances, and his son bets money on the race track. Don't think we sleep, Sollie!"

" *Shah,* woman!" interrupted Moses irritably. " Be still! To go out with a gentile don't mean that she will marry him. What business you want to go in, Sollie? I shouldn't throw my money away."

" Papa, it's the only business in a growing town like this—real estate. Tex Vincent, the sporting man, he bought up a lot of land when you could get it for a song—what you should have done, papa, instead of praying so much. Now Tex wants me in the business. He says I'm a hustler!" Sollie beamed proudly. " It's a sure thing, papa. Why shouldn't I get in on the ground floor?"

" But, Sollie," pleaded Moses, " what good does all the money do you when there ain't no heart for religion? Old Goldstein was telling me just the other day as how he never sees you any more in the synagogue. Is that right for the son of a rabbi? Ruthie goes out with gentile fellers, and instead from introducing her to some nice Jewish boy, you tell her to go ahead with a *goy.* Is that a good brother? A man should set a good example to his race—go to *schule,* and pray to God. He should close up his business on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana, and not always think from his pocketbook and good times in road houses!"

"Papa is right," said Rebecca. "It's the heart what counts. If you got no place from religion in your heart, then all the money in the world won't make it a place for you in heaven."

"Aw, mamma! Honest, you two make me tired!" Sollie looked disgusted. "What difference does it make where you go when you die? It's life what counts. Afterward, you're a long time dead!"

"No! No!" cried Moses. "Some day, when you are older, you will know better, Sollie. Maybe you will be rich and have nice gentile friends; but you will never know the thoughts I have had in my head. You will never know what means it to come to a wilderness where there is only fifteen yet from your own peoples, to build a synagogue and bring back a religion. That was happiness, Sollie—to build a *schule* with mine own hands, and to pray for mine peoples. That was living! You won't never know, my son, what it means to sing 'Kol Nidre' with your heart and soul crying! It's stone you got for a heart; but you don't count. No! No! The Torah lives forever; the synagogue never dies. Ruthie can go out with gentiles, and you can eat bread on Passover—don't think I'm blind, Sollie—but the synagogue it lives!"

"Papa, you shouldn't make yourself sick from talking so much," advised Rebecca. "Give him the money what he wants, and let him go his own way. *Goy* what he is! He should have seen the pogroms in Kishineff, and he would know what it means to be religious. Didn't I tell you, when still he was a boy, that he would grow up different from us old peoples? Didn't I seen him playing pool on *shabbas?* Never will I forget the time I seen him riding to the top from a building on a piece of iron. Anything he would do for money, except maybe go to *schule!*"

"Then you'll give me the money, papa? You'll stake me to two thousand?" Sollie broke in, impatient of further argument.

Moses shrugged his shoulders dismally.

"Yes—why not?" he whispered, deeply depressed.

III

The rousing noise of a motor car was heard from the street. Two people were whispering together on the porch—a man and woman. Abruptly the door swung open, and Ruth stood on the threshold. She looked flushed to the point of fever, and her fingers twisted nervously and moved into tense patterns.

"Ruthie! Guess what!"

In his enthusiasm, Sollie sprang forward and kissed his sister—not a usual occurrence with the undemonstrative young man. Ruth looked at him uncomprehendingly. It was obvious that all her thoughts were elsewhere. For a minute, she could only tremble under the stress of some insistent emotion.

"Papa's going to lend me that two thousand!" Sollie shouted at her. "Boy, won't Tex be glad?"

"Oh!" said Ruth wearily, and moved away from them toward her own bedroom.

"Where you was, Ruthie?" Moses asked her suddenly, and she stopped dead in her movements. "Is this an hour for a girl to come home?"

"Oh, papa! Don't bother me—please. I—I'm tired."

She made a step forward.

"Where you was, Ruthie?"

A tightness of steel bound that voice. She knew her father.

"Can't you see I'm all in, papa?" She turned on him with a sort of weak desperation. Then, abruptly, she drew back and flaunted a strength and independence that had come to her in an unexpected moment. "Well, why shouldn't you know now as well as any other time? I've just been married to Tex Vincent. He didn't come in with me, because we thought you might object; but I love him, papa—I love him!"

She started to sob without hiding her face.

It seemed as if years rose in thousands and were engulfed with each tick of the clock, until eternity had moved with the minute hand. Moses stirred at last from his place close to the table, and raised himself on one elbow. He smiled in a grotesque way.

"Ah, Ruthie! Why you joke, eh?"

But the mother comprehended at once.

"A *goy* she married! And she the daughter from a rabbi!"

Rebecca forgot her sewing, and it slipped from her knees to the floor in a curiously inanimate way. The needle that had moved so incessantly looked frozen into a silver stillness.

"Better we was all dead!" she cried.

"You're joking, Ruthie, no?" faltered Moses.

He was incredibly aged now, and his

beard gave him the remote appearance of a patriarch. The fire in his eyes was caught in a trance.

"Oh, no, we're married." Ruth's voice had become monotonous. "What of it? He's a human being, the same as you or anybody else. I'm very tired, papa, and I've got a lot of packing to do. Tex is taking me out to his mine at Boulder."

Moses had stood in the very heart's swirl of a Montana blizzard, and had been lifted and spun in its center. Just so was he caught up now and tossed about with no firm ground under his feet.

"Married—to a *goy!*"

He rose from his chair, wavered for a moment, and then stumbled to the floor, where he sat in a vacant stupor, like some vanquished idol. Ruth hurried to his side, and attempted to lift him gently.

"Papa! Please—you'll catch cold—oh, papa!"

"Away!" he cried. "*Shiksa!* Christian girl! A fire on your head! Go! I do not want to look on you, Ruthie. Do you hear? I do not want you! Just like yesterday you was a baby. I wanted another boy, but when I seen how pretty— You stand there like stone? Away! Any good Jewish boy you might have got, and now—how they will laugh on me! 'Take after the rabbi's children,' everybody said. 'Model yourself on the rabbi's children.' And now she marries a Christian, with not even a rabbi for the ceremony! And her children, they won't know what it is to belong to a synagogue!"

"I don't understand," said Ruth in a low voice. "All people are the same in this town. One's as good as another. Why should I marry the one you pick out for me, when my heart cries for some one else? I—I don't understand!"

"*Jessica! Jessica!*" *Shylock* had cried, reeling through the impassive streets of Venice. "Ruthie! Ruthie!" cried Moses, beating his breast with his fists; and all yesterdays were as to-day.

Ruth turned away from the pitiable sight, as if realizing how futile any more words would be. As she turned the knob of the door that led into her room, Sollie caught up with her.

"Good luck, sis!" he whispered. "Tex is a wonderful guy, and I'm glad you married him. Ain't you going to kiss your brother? Don't mind dad! He'll get over it."

"Better we never came out West! Better we stayed in Russia and lived under the Czar!" wept Rebecca, helping her husband to his feet.

Moses turned toward the window, and lifted the curtains. He strained his eyes peering through the glass.

"What, am I blind?" he chided himself in a mournful voice. "The synagogue, I do not see it, Rebecca. *Ich kann nicht sehen.* So many troubles! Who can tell? Maybe the great God has sent all this to punish me. Look, Rebecca! Maybe your eyes are yet better as mine."

Rebecca looked at this man with whom she had lived for so many years with a new and anxious bewilderment.

"Yes, it is there, papa. See? Like it was there since the world began."

After a moment, the old rabbi's eyes cleared, and he saw the synagogue, carved of the earth's elements, and immortal as thought. Stanch, true, the synagogue was there.

"I know how he feels, poor papa," wept Ruth, as Sollie helped to pack her belongings into the trunk; "but heavens, you only live once!"

"You said it sis," affirmed Sollie.

IV

SOLLIE did get in on the "ground floor"; and when the twelve-story Mendel Block rose on the corner of Park and Main Streets, he rose to financial eminence with it. Picture post cards circulated throughout the State with the legend:

Tallest Building in Montana

The name of Mendel took on a new meaning. No longer was it "Mendel, the old rabbi." People would say:

"Mendel—oh, he's a hustler! He certainly deserves all the money he's made. Did you ever see him work? Lord, like a machine! Always on the spot. I've seen him ride to the top of one of his buildings on a steel girder. Imagine! He says it gives him a sense of power. Some pep, that boy!"

Sollie no longer lived with his parents on East Silver Street. He had bachelor quarters in the new California Apartments, on West Broadway. The apartment house was still a novel thing for Silver Bow—an audacious, exhilarating experience. It gave the former camp an air of metropolitanism, and drew rents that had been undreamed of in the days when Marcus Daly and W.

A. Clark were fighting each other for supremacy. Sollie Mendel had risen, literally, on a steel girder to the lofty peaks of prosperity—a modern Solomon, with his hundreds of employees and his temples of commerce. The Solomons are wise—how wise!

Tearing down the old and building up the new—that was Sollie Mendel's greatest passion. The mechanical mastication of rock and soil between the enormous teeth of steam shovels, the rat-a-tat-tat of riveters—these were the songs most dear to Sollie's ears. The shophar of the synagogue did not reach him now. The call of the ram's horn could not penetrate the ribs of steel and stone that inclosed Sollie's dizzy world.

When Passover came, he was unaware that his parents were eating matzoth as he chewed a hasty ham sandwich between conferences. On the Day of Atonement he was drawing up plans for his new vaudeville theater and cabaret combined—the Orpheum Circuit in Silver Bow! The highest-paid Broadway stars! The best jazz band west of the Mississippi! Great is Solomon! Wise is he!

" Papa, I hear that a new building goes up soon next door the synagogue," said Rebecca. " Mr. Goldstein he says as how this part from town will be all teayters in a few years. *Nu!* Things don't stand still in America!"

" What you say?" answered Moses in dreadful surprise. " A building from next the synagogue? But it can't be. Ain't it Sollie what owns this ground?"

" Well, Sollie says as how he's willing to move the synagogue to another part from town. He thinks maybe it will hurt his show business."

" You talk *mit* Sollie?" Moses turned on his wife with anger blazing from his eyes. " After I did tell you he is no more a son from us?"

" But, papa," explained Rebecca, " can I pass him by when he meets me on the street? How can you know the way a mother feels for her son, bad as he is?"

But there were more pressing problems in the rabbi's mind.

" He wants to build next door the synagogue a teayter, a dance hall? But he can't do such a thing, Rebecca. *Gott!* Better he should never to be born. The synagogue I help to build with mine own hands! Never will he do such a thing!"

" He says as how it will help to make the town much more business," Rebecca went on. " He will make a big cabaret, like the one on Park Street—the Dreamland, where they dance this ragtime. I think, papa, it would be better if we let him move the synagogue to the other side from town, where everything is quiet."

" I move nothing!" stormed Moses. " Nothing! My son, he is not such a devil that he will not listen to me. I will go to him. Yes, mamma, get me my hat and coat. For the sake from my religion I will go and talk with that man who is no more my son. My daughter she marries a gentile, and now my son wants to build a dance hall over my heart, where all the scum from the town will dance and make fun. *Pfah!* Mine coat! I will go to him like I am only a Jew, and not his father."

" Papa, *mach nicht ein geschrei!* Do not get excitable with him! What will all the peoples think over such a thing, fighting with one from your own children? Better you stay home and wait a week, and then maybe I will see Solly my own self and talk nice—"

" *Shah!* Where is your mind that you talk like this? You are a woman. The kitchen is your place. Do you think I am without a heart and soul, that I will see them break the synagogue for a dance hall? I will go and speak with that man who long ago was my son!"

V

THE elevator boy at the California Apartments was insolently certain that Mr. Mendel was not at home; but Moses brushed past the loyal servant imperiously, and, without knocking, opened the door that led into his son's agreeably decorated rooms.

Sollie, in his shirt sleeves, sat at a desk that was heaped high with plans and blue prints. Despite his pallor, his haggard, drawn look, there was about him a refulgence of feverish activity, an electrical restlessness that clung to his personality under all circumstances. His eyes flashed as they examined the mass of papers so intricately diagramed and meticulously drawn to scale. This was Sollie's life—his whole life!

He looked up with annoyance as the door opened, but at sight of his father his reaction was one of pleasurable pride.

" Papa! Well, well! This is a surprise! Take a chair, papa! My, you look old now, you know! Here, papa, this is a nice, soft chair for you."

But Moses refused to be beguiled from his mission by any trivial conventionalities. He planted himself in front of the door, and the expression of his face was stubborn and dark. He addressed his son in Yiddish.

"They did tell me as how you will build a teayter and dance hall next door the *schule.*"

"Yeh! Ain't that great? And just think, papa, we're getting the Orpheum Circuit into this town. It's the best vaudeville in the country. On the roof, I'm going to have a cabaret with a real jazz band. I tell you, Silver Street is the coming White Way! I was just telling—"

"You must not build in such a place, where the ground is sacred," interrupted Moses, and his voice was as stone. "You must not build. It is I who say it, chazan from the synagogue!"

Sollie forgot his plans for the time being, and scratched the top of his head in quizzical fashion.

"I don't get you, papa. What are you talking about?"

"It is plain talk," resumed Moses. "I say you must not build a house of pleasure in such a place. Before you was yet born, the synagogue was there, and it must not be changed. This is plain talk."

Sollie rustled the papers on his desk with an irritable nervousness.

"The plans are drawn," he said coldly. "It is too late. Besides, I will give the synagogue a fine location on the South Side. *Zehst,* papa? I'll build a beautiful church for you. I got an architect coming out from New York who's going to set the town on fire with his ideas. He can build churches with his eyes closed. What's more, I'll agree to stand part of the cost. What more do you want?"

"Your money I don't want. You get it from bad women and race tracks. Synagogues are not built from such a kind of money. Forty years have I lived in one place. Forty years now the synagogue stands in peace. God's house don't want money—it wants prayer. Five years you put not a foot inside the *schule.* On Passover you eat bread in the tref restaurants. On Yom Kippur you eat when I fast, when I am weak before Jehovah. A whole year you do your business and you sin with women, and with the New Year you do not come to the synagogue and ask forgiveness for your sins. *Finster is mir!* Dark is my life! I prayed God for a son who would be as a staff in my old years. I was too proud, too confident. But I will not speak like a father. I speak as a Jew. I say you must not build a dance hall in such a place that will shame Israel. It is plain talk!"

"Oh, papa, for the Lord's sake—"

"I have spoken!"

"Papa, I'll do anything you say but that. Now look here, papa. Sit down. You seem like a stranger to me. You think everything is in my hands, don't you? Wait a minute. Business to-day ain't that simple. If I was the whole shooting match in every deal I put over, I could fix things to suit your ideas; but there's creditors, there's the bank, there's the vaudeville people, there's contracts, there's a pay roll."

Sollie droned on and on, trying to put in a kindly way items that filled his waking hours until they were inevitable incidents in his life.

"Now take the bank, for instance. Do you know—"

"I have spoken!" cried Moses.

There was blood in his voice, there were unutterable agonies and age-long tears in his voice.

"*Jessica! Jessica!*" *Shylock* had implored, wringing his hands and beating his breast, while the amused spectators of his grief spat upon his gaberdine.

"I have spoken!" cried Moses, breaking down at last and becoming, inevitably, a father pleading with his son. This modern day was too much for him. He was crying before a son who did not deserve a father's tears. "Sollie! I ask you, Sollie, if—"

The aged man clutched at the desk for support.

"Papa, here—take this chair. Wait—I'll get you a glass of wine. Wait a minute! Gee, you mustn't excite yourself like that! What's the use? The world ain't worth it, I say. That's my opinion. The world—"

"No!" Moses held out his hand to refuse the proffered refreshment, so that the glass slipped from Sollie's hand, and the wine poured out like a stream of blood on the floor. "I will go home."

"Papa, wait! Let me call you a taxi. Wait—"

Moses turned defiantly on his son.

"You think I am already dead, hoh? You think I cannot walk, hoh?"

Sollie started to expostulate, but after a minute he found himself talking to blank walls. Moses was out of the room, and the spilled wine, winking in golden puddles under the light of the chandelier, was the only reminder of the rabbi's presence in that house.

"Well, papa, you seen him, eh?" asked Rebecca, as Moses slowly closed the door after him. From her husband's expression, Rebecca knew well enough what the result of the meeting had been. "You talked *mit* him, eh?"

"The evil one, I seen him!" answered Moses sadly. "Look, it is already the Sabbath, and my heart is full of evil things. Bring me my prayer shawl, Rebecca. I will go to *schule* and pray. To think that after forty years I should forget it was *shabbas! Nu,* we are not young forever."

Before the altar he knelt long, praying in his golden tenor voice for those of his race, all over the world, who have departed from the path of virtue and the ways of the ancestors. Some thought him unconscious there under the holy Torah. His body was pressed down by a heavy grief that left his muscles numb. It was ever a house of lamentation, the synagogue, ever a place of tears and sobs. Those tall white candles with their shooting ribbons of flame were ever impassive spectators of scenes of grief.

Moses lay huddled and broken there at the foot of the altar. The congregation was small. From Sabbath to Sabbath it grew smaller these days. Many of those who had helped to build this house of worship now lay in the small cemetery at the edge of the flats, where the restlessly moving shadows of the Rockies soothed their long sleep with a soundless lullaby of light and shade. They had striven courageously; and now the drifting shadows were their flags at half mast.

The children of those pioneers were too busy to come to Friday service. It was enough, they said, that they attended on the big holidays of the year. Did they not close their places of business on Yom Kippur, thereby incurring heavy losses in these hard times? And anyway, what does it get you? In the end, you're a long time dead!

The rabbi knelt there long. To the north, on the richest copper hill in the world, cages slid up and down the bottomless shafts, carrying loads of men into the deep womb of the earth. Thousands of feet down, grimy miners bled the rich veins of copper—an unending stream of burnished blood, blood of the earth, blood of the rock. The mines sang out a continuous medley of toil; and the smelters, like seething volcanoes, scorched the sky with pennants of hilarious fire.

Moses prayed.

VI

WITHIN the month, the steel skeleton of Sollie's new wonder building was reaching up into the blue, and waiting for the bone of cement and the flesh of brick to cover its grim nudity. All day the clang of signal bells and the shouts of workmen corroded the hours into a mechanical conspiracy.

There was something about the construction of a great building that filled Sollie Mendel's soul with unspeakable delight, and lifted him into the rarest atmosphere of his existence. He possessed no deep powers of human love. It could not be said of him that he loved a single human being with fervor, though many were known to bask in the thin sunlight of his commendation. His creed, evasive as a butterfly, had little to do with human relationships.

Nevertheless, Sollie was capable of vivid emotional feeling. There were a few sensations that roused him to a fine exaltation—sensations concerned with tearing down the old and building up the new. It was sordid to destroy old beauties, as Sollie destroyed them; but it was idealistic to create new beauties, as Sollie created them. He was not a symbol of American enterprise. He *was* that enterprise in human force, with all its multitudinous defects and virtues. His work, complete within itself, and disdainful of outside impressions, was his whole life, his religion, and his immortality.

"My work! My endeavor! My masterpiece!" his heart cried out, when he beheld his buildings in the sky.

It soared out of his breast and lifted with the steel girders as they rose hundreds of feet into the air, to be riveted into position. Sollie did not know of Shakespeare and Keats; but if it were possible to translate them into terms of steel and brick, he would have understood.

The synagogue looked small beside the rising structure that was one day to be "the livest cabaret in the whole Northwest." Within the church, the few faithful were not daunted by the rat-a-tat-tat of the riveters, and the unceasing hammering of steel on steel. The barbaric shriek of the twelve-o'clock whistle could not altogether obliterate the call of the shophar, the sacred horn blown to recall men to worshipful ways.

The tall steel structure flaunted its fine, gleaming beauty, like a picked officer of the guard conscious of his brave uniform; but the synagogue was life itself, stripped of all outward show and pride, feeling its roots in the uncountable ages, lifting its aspirations beyond the star-flecked floor of the sky.

The new building climbed five, six, seven stories—a skyscraper for Silver Bow—and Sollie's enthusiasm climbed with it.

" I'll ride up with you!" he said to one of his workmen, who sat astride one of the girders.

They rose together, and Sollie's thoughts soared as they climbed. He saw the whole vista of Silver Bow beneath him—the mines, the smelters, the buildings, many of them his own, the streets gay threads in a skillfully designed texture, crossing and recrossing. Up, up, up, and he beheld, far to the northwest, the peaks of the Cœur d' Alenes. He felt almost certain that he saw out there, beyond the last shoulder of the mountains, the State of Idaho; and somewhere beyond were Oregon and the great rolling Pacific. The world was not so large, after all. It could be conquered to the last obstacle.

Up, up, up—how fine, how straight and beautiful is a skyscraper! What woman, what beloved friend can compare with it? The steel shines more brightly than any pair of eyes, and the stately architecture makes the human form so small, so weak and ephemeral!

" Poor papa down there!" thought Sollie. " Poor papa, stagnating, keeping to the old ways! If he could only rise and see the world as I see it! Poor papa, praying and whining down there! Why are Jews always whining about this and that and the other—whining about persecution and prejudice? The thing to do is to battle away all walls with your brain! Religion must be construction and change. Religion must be steel on steel, story on story, steep as a cliff, piercing the clouds. Religion is industry, and the management of hundreds of people. This, this is religion!"

Even the mountains, which appeared so mighty from down below, so formidable, looked docile from this great height. The trees were pins in a brightly colored map; and the Great Divide was only a back drop lowered to entertain Eastern tourists. Everything was puny but this fine human effort, this imposing structure, this strong girder being drawn to the suspended lamp of the sun, exhilarating the blood and inspiring the senses. To forget one's self in one's work—that was the highest pinnacle of life, of ambition!

Down below, Moses prayed.

" God of our fathers, have mercy on Thy people! Show us the right way, O Lord, the one God and the true God! Thou art so great and man is so small! Lead us into humble, worshipful paths, so that we may not forget thy greatness. The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Amen!"

VII

A FEW weeks later they were ready to move the last girder into place. There it lay, the last mighty limb waiting to become a part of the giant, the bone that would give consummate strength and balance to the perfect whole.

No one could know that not so many years past, a lone prospector had found silver and copper just beneath. Then Silver Bow had been a wilderness, hidden away in the hollows of the Rocky Mountains. Now the city was a jewel glittering at the throat of a copper-limbed Apollo, whose feet rested deep in the prismatic treasure holes, and whose head crowded the stars toward the horizon.

" I'll take the ride up," cried Sollie; " just to celebrate! Here, give me room! I want to go up, up, up! I like it, man! It's better than a cocktail to me!"

So he was allowed to take his place on the girder that moved upward in the sunlight, a free and brave spectacle to the eye.

Sollie felt now that the apex of his life had been reached. His career was its own justification. He had planned, toiled, accomplished. He had produced this structure, strong, vivid, resolute.

He rose to his feet on the vessel of steel afloat in the vast ocean of air. He was captain of the world. The clouds were his sails and the sun his compass.

From down below, some one cried up at him to be careful, but Sollie did not hear. How hear the world, so far away? He stood thus, stanch and clean against the sky, a statue on a moving pedestal, and the golden brush of the sun stroked him into brilliant beauty. For one single moment he was all immortality.

Then, without warning, the girder turned turtle. Sollie lost his footing. Like a bird that has been caught in its flight by a bullet, he fell instantaneously down upon the cement floor, and was still.

He was quickly the center of a mad confusion. They lifted his broken body, and his arms hung as if no longer a part of him. Somewhere a flame of life sputtered in his depth, as if unwilling that those eyes which had beheld such grandeur, such color, should be forever closed.

There was only one place to take Sollie. The synagogue door was open, as always, and it was cool and restful within. There must be something divine where there is rest.

Moses Mendel was caught away from his prayer. Turning, he saw that broken form, those incredibly listless arms, coming nearer. Was Solomon of old broken so at the last?

" Fell down—"

" Girder wabbled—"

" He's alive—"

" Glass of water—"

" Somebody call a doctor—police—"

" Stand away from him, you fools—"

" His own fault—"

" You shut up. What do you know about—"

" Where's a glass of water, for God's sake?"

Moses calmed the confusion with his fine, peaceful hands; and all sound died away as quickly as it had commenced.

" Leave us! He is my son! Peace in this house! Leave us!"

In the rear darkness an old woman was weeping into her apron. She had been at the kitchen fire, presumably, getting something out of the oven, when the news had come, and she had forgotten to remove her apron. No one had ever seen her when she wasn't drudging, scrubbing, cooking, sewing. Her apron was somehow a badge.

Moses lifted his son's head into his lap, and passed a soothing hand over the boy's eyes. He prayed rapidly—something about death:

" Oh, our Father! Receive — into the dust—"

He prayed in Hebrew.

Sollie wished to speak. He mumbled. He smiled with a terrific audacity. His breast rose, and he was bent like steel white-hot out of the furnace.

" Papa, you see—ain't it—a beautiful building—I put up? Papa, I built—I—"

He clung madly to his pride, releasing hold at last with a long sigh.

Moses bent and gathered the dead man, his son, into his arms. He stood erect, holding the body under the holy Torah.

" I offer him to Thee, O Lord! Thou knowest best. Thou art so great, and man —what is man?"

After it had grown quite dark, the steel structure next door looked dumb and cold; but the synagogue was alive with a golden agony of prayer and song. The moon looked on through beams tinged crimson and blue and gold as they streamed through the windows.

There was no ending to the song heard in the synagogue. It was as a tree whose roots are in the million nights since Abraham, and whose branches cannot be seen.

THE WANDERER

THE wind comes walking through my house
  On restless feet and light,
When all my casements open wide
  To welcome in the night.

I hear it stir a window flap
  Or move a rocking-chair,
And wistfully go stepping on
  To linger at the stair.

I listen and I sigh, my dear,
  Though housed, and happy, too;
For you were ever like the wind—
  Is there no rest for you?

Neeta Marquis

The Twisted Foot

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT WEST

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Rider of Golden Bar," etc.

SAM CALTROP, manager of the Eighty-Eight Ranch, and Rum Gordon, the foreman, order Buff Warren, one of their cowboys, to drive off a family of "nesters," who have defied the cattlemen by settling on the range, and have actually dared to plow up a patch of it. Buff finds that Abijah Fair, head of the offending family, is blind, and the eldest daughter, Gilian, is such a pretty girl that the cowboy loses his heart to her. Moved by sympathy and love, instead of molesting the Fairs, he declares himself on their side, and helps them with their plowing. This act of treason, as it seems to all good cattlemen, necessitates the resignation of his job at the Eighty-Eight.

The next day sees Buff again at the Fairs' place, where he learns that some unknown enemy has just driven off their little bunch of cattle. He follows the raider—who proves to be one Andy Tresawna, a gambler—takes him by surprise, and disarms him. Then he turns back the Fairs' cattle, and starts Tresawna on his way to the neighboring town of Farewell, from which the gambler hails.

X

WHEN they arrived at Packsaddle, the creek was in spate, for there had been rain in the Frying Pans.

"She's running too strong to swim," said Tresawna. "I guess maybe I better go the other way."

"Not at all," said Buff warmly. "You were heading this way when I met you. It's the long way to Farewell, but I expect you've got reasons. I'll pick you a ford, Andy. There's one a mile upstream. Turn to the left!"

When they reached the ford, the way down to it was a narrow gully between cut banks, above which brush grew thickly. Here, at the head of the gully, Buff returned his gun to Tresawna.

"I unloaded it," he told Tresawna. "No," he added, as the other permitted himself a slight smile, "I haven't overlooked the rifle under your leg. I took a chance on that from the beginning. Go straight down the gully, and let me see you going straight after you reach the other side. The cottonwoods ain't growing so thick over there that I can't keep the sights on you till you're out of range."

"So long!" Tresawna said amiably. "See you later!"

"Maybe," rejoined the noncommittal Buff, and drew the Winchester from the scabbard under his left fender.

Tresawna held straight across the ford, passed through the cottonwoods lining the farther bank, and trotted out across the rising ground beyond—an easy slope which ended in a low ridge a mile away. Halfway up the slope, he turned in the saddle and looked back. He was above the cottonwoods on his own side of the creek, and he could see the gully where he had left Buff Warren. As he looked, he saw Buff wave an arm in ironic farewell, turn his horse, and ride away.

Tresawna looked to the front and kept on going. A hundred yards farther on he again hung his chin on his shoulder. Buff was passing out of sight beyond a swell.

"Here," said Tresawna, a wide and humorous smile adorning his thin lips—"here is where I shine!"

Passing over the crest of the ridge, he angled down the slope to a gap filled with a thin growth of young lodgepole pine. He rode back through the gap and headed up toward the ford. He did not hurry. There was plenty of time. It was necessary that Buff should be well on his way before Andy could risk coming out of the gully on the opposite side of the creek.

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Tresawna chuckled as he rode. Although a gambler, he never attempted to conceal his feelings when such concealment was unnecessary. Now he felt that he was master of the situation.

He knew the route Buff would follow in driving the cattle back to the Fair place. It was the shortest way, and Buff would be almost sure to take it. Lying, as it did, in the low ground between the sprawling shoulders of two hills, it offered a rare opportunity for the ambush Tresawna had in mind. The low ground was not more than four hundred yards in width. Over all ranges up to six hundred yards, Andy rather fancied himself as a rifle shot.

He subjected his plan to the searching scrutiny of his excellent mind, and found no appreciable flaw. Of course, accidents might happen; but that is true of any undertaking.

"It's safe enough," he told himself. "That kid didn't see my face plain. Buff won't see or say anything again. The cattle can't talk."

He drew the rifle from under his leg and partly opened the breech, to make sure that a cartridge was in the barrel. There was one. He clicked the mechanism shut, and returned the rifle to the scabbard.

Against the man he intended to kill he felt no great animosity. This, partly because Buff had held him up in private, and partly because it was his habit to take a setback calmly. Nothing can be gained by becoming excited or thinking harsh thoughts of any one. Keep cool, remedy the setback, if necessary wiping out the person who stands in the way. That was the creed of Mr. Andrew Tresawna. It was one worthy of a better man.

Riding along the edge of the cottonwood belt bordering the creek, the gambler turned his horse's head when he saw the broken line of water marking the ford, and spurred down into the creek. Reaching the opposite shore, he rode in between the yellow banks of the gully.

Lost in contemplation of his clever plan for rendering Buff innocuous for all time, Tresawna did not see the rope that an expert arm pitched out of the bushes above his head. The shock of his surprise, when the loop jerked tight about his body and elbows, was truly appalling. He was still experiencing this mental agitation during his flight backward through the air at the end of the rope.

The impact, as he struck the earth, knocked the wind out of him. Through a fog of shimmery specks of light he saw the hazy face of Buff Warren; but he did not feel Buff's exploring fingers.

When the fog cleared away and he could see with comparative clarity, he saw Buff sitting tailor fashion in front of him, and discovered that he himself was bound like a roast in readiness for the oven. He could wiggle his fingers, but he did not wish to wiggle his fingers. He wished to perforate Buff Warren between the eyes.

No hint of this reprehensible desire appeared on his countenance. On the contrary, he smiled.

"Here we are again," remarked Andy Tresawna.

"For once you've told the truth," Buff said grimly. "Did you lose your way?"

"I forgot something."

"You've found it. You must have thought I went away from here when I rode over the rise."

"To tell the truth, I did."

"To tell the truth, I didn't. I came back through a gap like the one I expect you came through on the other side of the creek. I knew you'd try a play like this when I turned you loose. That's why I left your rifle. You think I overlooked it?"

A slow red mounted to the roots of Tresawna's pale hair. It was painfully evident that he had committed a grave error in craftsmanship. He had underestimated Buff. A man in his line of business should never underestimate any one or anything. That way lies failure.

"Don't take it so to heart," Buff advised, reading the telltale flush aright. "We all make mistakes."

"This here is one of yours," Tresawna drawled, still with the same pleasant smile.

"No threats! But I expect you'll shoot me in the back first chance you get. I don't know whether that would suit me. Are you open to argument, Andy?"

"What kind of an argument?"

"I'll put both our guns on that flat rock yonder, under the bank. Then I'll turn you loose. We'll start at the word, jump for the guns, and see what luck we have. How about it?"

"Suits me," was the succinct acceptance.

Buff arose, drew his six-shooter, and laid both it and the gambler's weapon on the flat rock. He returned to Tresawna and began to loosen the rope that bound him.

When his prisoner was released, Buff stepped back, and, watching Tresawna the while, began to coil his rope. Tresawna propped himself up on one hand, drew up his knees, and began to massage his ankles with his free hand.

"You pulled that rope too tight," he grumbled.

"You're hard to please," rejoined Buff, laying his neat coil of rope on the ground.

"I don't know that I can run as fast as you," Tresawna continued to complain.

"Oh, I guess you can. Say, Andy, you don't think you're making any impression on your ankles through those boots, do you? The leather's stiff as a cow's horn. Let's get it over with. I've got some other business to attend to."

"Pity you won't be there to attend to it," was Tresawna's sneer.

Buff made no comment. He expected that within the next sixty seconds either he or Tresawna would be dead. He felt neither anxious uncertainty nor that absolute confidence in the outcome experienced by many men on the brink of great events. Rather he felt as one confronted by a disagreeable job of work. There it was. A man had to do the best he could.

"Come on, Andy," said Buff. "Are you ready? Let's go!"

Tresawna rose to his feet. Buff, his head turned to watch his adversary, had set himself. Each man was about equally distant from the flat rock at the base of the cut bank.

"There's only one gun on that rock!" exclaimed Tresawna.

Instinctively Buff turned his head to look. As he did so, he sensed, rather than saw, the right arm of Tresawna fly up. Instinctively he ducked, and then desperately tried to make good his double error by starting headlong for the flat rock and his weapon; but the mischief was done. Although the stone Tresawna flung at him went wide, Buff, thrown off his balance by the twisting of his body in dodging, slipped and fell flat on his face.

He was up almost as quickly as he went down, but Tresawna was already stooping over the rock, his hands snatching at both revolvers.

Buff, believing in his heart that it was too late, nevertheless sprang forward on the off chance that something might happen; and something did. The gambler, still bent over the rock, had caught up both guns and started to turn, when a projectile apparently composed of slender, brown-booted legs, billowing brown skirt, and flying honey-colored hair, shot over the edge of the cut bank and landed with both feet on the back of his neck.

Tresawna's face immediately struck the rock a most resounding smack. His body relaxed, even as Buff reached him and tore the guns from his limp grasp. Buff need not have been in such a hurry, for Andy Tresawna was definitely out.

XI

Calm, efficient, practical, that was Gilian. She sat on a rock, panting a little, with her elbows on her knees, and stared at the unconscious Tresawna.

"I guess I came just in time," she remarked judicially. "I ran that mule faster than he ever went in his life!"

"You shouldn't have come," Buff told her, with all the severity of an elder brother. "I told you not to. You said you wouldn't."

"No, I didn't. I only said, 'I expect so.' I'm always careful about the truth. It pays. I came mighty near missing you. It was luck I heard your voices. You were talking mighty loud. Now, don't be cross! I wanted to see what you'd do with the rustler. You don't *really* mind, do you?"

Gilian, with her head on one side—Gilian, with her amber eyes pleading with him—Gilian, eying him wistfully—an entirely different Gilian from the one who had told him to go away and never come back! All this, combined with the fact that she had just saved his life, reduced Buff to the consistency of melted butter.

"You shouldn't have come," he repeated weakly.

"When mother uses that tone, it means that everything is all right."

"You might have been hurt—badly hurt," he continued, still more weakly.

Gilian quite properly ignored this suggestion. She nodded toward Tresawna.

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Nothing," said Buff. "You'd better take your horse and ride home now. I'll be along later," he added, seeing that she made no move to get up.

"Thank you, I'll go when you do. I'm in this business now!"

"I—" began Buff.

"Oh, I know what you've got in mind. You'll try this over again, or something equally dangerous, and I'm going to stay right here and see it through!"

Buff was aghast.

"But—"

"I think he's waking up," interrupted Gilian.

As she spoke, Tresawna turned over and groaned.

"I might 'a' knowed that horse would kick," muttered the gambler, without opening his eyes.

Gilian snickered appreciatively.

"He's still wandering in green fields," she murmured—which allusion, it must be said, was lost on Buff.

Tresawna opened his eyes. For a moment his glazed stare played over Buff unrecognizingly; then, slowly, comprehension filtered back into his numbed brain.

He struggled up on an elbow. He looked at the rock that had stopped his face. The surface of the stone was red with blood. He put his hand to his face. Palm and fingers came away redder than the stone.

"What hit me?" he demanded, apparently forgetful of the trickery with which he had striven to take Buff's life.

"You hit yourself—on that rock," replied Buff. "Don't make any sudden motion."

"I ain't movin'," declared Tresawna; "but I'm still curious. What hit me on the back of the neck before I hit the rock?"

"I did," Gilian took it upon herself to reply.

"You did?" inquired Tresawna, for the first time, seemingly, aware of the girl's presence.

Gilian nodded, her warm amber eyes looking squarely into his cold green pair.

"I'll try and not forget that," drawled Tresawna.

"You'd better forget," advised Buff. "This gully is one right good place to leave a man!"

"Not this man," Tresawna declared with great confidence.

"Don't be too sure!"

"In a book, maybe. This is real life. That's why I don't mind being bad friends with you, Buff. I feel so safe." The gambler drew himself up a little higher, and beamed a crooked smile at Buff with his split lips. "Yes," he added, "I sure feel safe!"

Buff knew what the gambler meant, and knew that Tresawna knew that he knew it. His anger flared like tow.

"Tresawna, a coyote is a fair-playing animal alongside of you! When you feel you've pulled around enough to hold a gun, we'll—"

Gilian stifled a squeak of dismay with her hand. Tresawna looked at her.

"Don't worry, my girl," he said. "I've had about all the exercise I'm goin' to take to-day."

"We'll go across the creek and finish it up," insisted Buff.

"Why, no," contradicted Tresawna. "I wouldn't care for any."

"You're a worse coward than I thought!"

"No, only sensible. Sensible is one of my middle names, Buff. The other two are Slow and Sure. Everything will even up in the end. I don't mind waiting."

"I wonder, if I got your quirt—" began the thoroughly incensed puncher.

Tresawna shook his head.

"Wouldn't do a bit of good. You haven't the heart to hit a man when he's down. I'm down, and I ain't gettin' up."

"When you do get up, you'll walk. Come along, Gilian!"

"When you get through with my horse and my gun and my rifle," suggested the irrepressible Tresawna, dropping back on his elbow, "I'd take it kindly if you'd leave them at the Happy Heart. Just tell the bartender."

Buff did not reply. He picked up the trailing reins of Tresawna's horse, and Gilian and he started back to where the girl had left her mule.

"I expect we'd better hurry," said Buff. "The Bob twin must have told 'em there at the house."

"The Bob twin has done nothing of the sort. I knew he'd run and tell, and they'd worry, so I tied him to a cottonwood with a plow line."

"They must have heard him yell."

She shook her head.

"There was enough of the plow line left to gag him with."

Buff gazed at her with silent admiration.

"You do think of everything!" he said at last.

His heart was very full. This girl walking beside him had saved his life. Her beauty was the most alluring he had ever seen. Just to look at her called to mind everything good and sweet and pure that he had ever known.

When they had left the gully for the

woods, and were within a few steps of the mule, where he stood tied in the shade of a whispering cottonwood, a pebble turned under the ball of Gilian's foot. She stumbled and clutched at Buff's arm. Both his arms flew out to catch her, and somehow, as he caught her up, she swung against his chest.

The fragrance of her unbound hair was in his nostrils. The dam of his self-control gave way. He held her close and kissed her forehead, her closed eyelids, her lips; and when he kissed her lips, it seemed to him that she kissed him back.

For a breathless moment she lay passive. Then she thrust her two hands against his breast and strove to push him away.

"I love you," he muttered. "I've loved you from the moment I saw you there at the ranch."

"No! No!" she cried hysterically. "You mustn't! You're mad! You don't know what you're saying! Let me go!"

But he would not, and tried to kiss her mouth again. She ducked her head, and he only succeeded in kissing her hair.

"Let me go!" she commanded in strangled tones. "Do you want me to hate you?"

He let her go at this. She staggered away from him and clung to a cottonwood for support. He followed, pleading:

"I love you, don't you understand? I love you. I want you to marry me."

She looked at him wildly. Then, to his astonishment, she sank down on the ground, buried her face in her hands, and began to sob.

At once he was all contrition. He knelt beside her and slipped his arm around her shaking shoulders.

"Oh, God!" he heard the muffled whisper. "What have I done? Oh, I don't deserve—"

She pushed him away with her elbow. Helplessly he sat back on his heels and let her have her cry out. He did not watch her. To see her heaving bosom fighting for breath hurt him immeasurably. Her choking sobs tore at his heart. He swore under his breath.

At long last her hands came away from her tear-wet face. She did not look at Buff, but fumbled for her handkerchief and could not find it.

"Here," he said, and gave her his.

Forlornly she dabbed at her reddened eyes and dried her cheeks.

"I don't give way very often," she murmured with a twisted smile. She sat up straight and looked at him, her hands in her lap. "I think you and I had better have a little talk."

"I meant it, every word," he told her huskily. "I'm not sorry I kissed you," he added truthfully.

"If it will do you any good," said she, "I'm not sorry, either. I—I think I wanted you to. No, sit still. I've experienced quite enough emotion for one while. You and I are going to be sensible people from now on."

"If being sensible means not loving you, then count me out. I'd kiss you again, if I got the chance."

"I think not," she said with decision; "not if I don't want you to!"

"But you said—"

"I said I wanted you to that particular time. I didn't say I wanted you to make a practice of it, and I don't intend that you shall."

"But I love you!"

"That is not an adequate reason. You see, I don't love you."

"But you could learn."

She shook her head.

"Love doesn't come that way. I'm going to be honest with you. I can't marry you."

"Why not?"

"Oh, drat the man! I can't, and that settles it. You'll have to be satisfied with that."

"I ain't—not a bit. Do you like somebody else?"

"N-n-no, I don't."

"Then why haven't I a chance?"

"Because—" she began, and hesitated.

"Because why?"

"I can't tell you. You'll have to take my word for it."

"But I don't understand."

"Why should you?" She rose and dusted her skirts. "Just put me out of your mind, Mr. Warren. It's impossible—really it is. Don't think I'm ungrateful for all you've done. I am—beyond words. If I can ever return—but I can't; and I think it would be better if I didn't see you again."

"What?"

Gilian nodded.

"Indeed, it's much the better way—easier for both of us. I'll be going now. No, don't come with me. I can gather up these cattle myself."

She untied the check rein with which she had tied her mule, placed her hand on his withers, and vaulted lightly upon his bare back.

"Good-by!" she called over her shoulder, as she swung the mule around and kicked him into a gallop.

XII

Buff, who had no intention of being dismissed in this summary fashion, threw himself across the saddle of Tresawna's horse and raced the fifty or sixty yards to where he had left Buster. Startled at this sudden onrush, the high-strung Buster promptly stripped his bridle and fled. Being somewhat speedier than Tresawna's horse, it was twenty minutes before Buff could pen him in some undergrowth and get a rope on him. By the time he had led him out into the open country, Gilian was nowhere in sight.

He picked up the hoofprints of her mule leading toward a swell half a mile away. When he was within three hundred yards of the low ridge, something struck a rock between the two horses and ricocheted with a sharp *szwe-e-e.* At the same instant, from a belt of woodland in his rear, there sounded the stirring crack of a rifle.

R-rip! Another bullet plugged the ground within ten inches of his mount's near forefoot.

Buff clapped home the spurs and went up the swell at racing gait. He swept over the top and down the reverse slope. If the marksman in his rear had fired again, the sound of the shot had been drowned in the thunder of hoofs. At any rate, neither he nor the two horses had been hit.

Buff spurred along the low ground under the swell and turned into a draw leading toward Packsaddle Creek. He had marked a certain patch of willows among the fringe of trees and brush bordering the creek, where the powder smoke had betrayed the bushwhacker, and he believed he stood a chance to make matters better than even.

As he galloped, he speculated as to how Tresawna had obtained a rifle. That the unseen enemy could be any one but Andy did not enter his head. Who else would wish to murder him? While it was more than possible that either Caltrop or Rum Gordon might eventually shoot him, they would do it in a reasonably fair way.

The place where he had marked the smoke was within two hundred yards of the gully in which he had left Tresawna. Where the draw petered out in the low ground near the creek, he pulled his mount down to a trot. Although here the creek curved away from him in a wide bend, and he was hidden from the place where he had seen the powder smoke, he was taking no chances. The enemy might have come down stream. There was no knowing what he had done.

Buff safely reached the shelter of the cottonwoods, where he dismounted and tied both horses. Trailing his rifle, he ran to a young willow growing close to the edge of the cut bank of the creek, from behind which he was able to look across the bend to the mouth of the very gully where he had left Tresawna.

He did not see any one, or anything that looked suspicious. The sun shone, the creek water ran glassy clear in the shallows, the leaves of the cottonwoods whispered together, and that was apparently all.

As he knelt and watched the prospect, a cigarette butt, turning lazily in an eddy, gradually drifted in and began nuzzling the shore with little thrusting motions, almost as if it were trying to attract attention. It did.

Buff did not dare emerge from his place of concealment in order to inspect the tiny drifter more closely; but he could see enough to know that this was not the butt of a cigarette built after the usual fashion of that time and place. Its color and size showed that it was made of corn paper—that large species of cigarette paper termed "saddleblankets" in the vernacular of the Southwest.

Tresawna, in common with a few others, used white rice papers of the same size and shape as the brown wheat straw papers carried by Buff and most of the Territory's inhabitants.

What was there about this innocent-appearing butt to stir Buff's memory with a sense of familiarity? He did not know a soul who used such cigarette papers; but there it was. It aroused in Buff a faint suggestion of something evil; but with what particular piece of wickedness it was connected he could not think.

Buff did not know how long a butt would remain in the water before disintegrating, but he believed that it must have been dropped in that day, and not so far upstream. A stranger, as the smoker of corn paper cigarettes undoubtedly was, would in all likelihood be on his way to the Bar S, to the Eighty-Eight, or to Farewell. Although these places lay in different directions, the ways to them all led through the gully where Buff had argued with Tresawna. Possibly, however, the stranger was wandering astray—in which event, as in dry weather, all signs would fail.

Crouching, alert as a fox, Buff made his way slowly and with extreme caution through the cottonwoods and brush. Well within a hundred yards of the would-be murderer's ambush, he lay down on his stomach and waited fifteen minutes before proceeding farther.

When he finally did proceed, his advance was made on his stomach. He wriggled like a snake to a point between two cottonwoods where a slight rise enabled him to command the bushwhacker's position.

Here again he waited—waited till a jay lit on one of the willows and began to scream for its mate.

"There can't be any one there," he told himself.

Nevertheless, when he once more started forward, it was with extremest caution and belly-flat. It was more than possible that the enemy had changed position. Indian fashion, he might be waiting at one side, ready to pour the lead into Buff when he should reach his objective.

Buff was no coward, but blind creeping toward possible death is an eerie proceeding. He felt the skin crawl between his shoulder blades.

Save for the whisper of the leaves of the cottonwood trees, it was very silent. The jay had stopped screaming. Head on one side, the bird watched Buff with a bright and speculative eye; and for the twelfth time he assured himself that there was no one there.

He wished that he had a saddle gun. His rifle was too long for the job in hand. It was difficult to handle among the brush and stiff-stemmed weeds.

The patch of willows looked very dense. It might be concealing two or three men. Possibly, too, some one was drawing a bead on him from that cluster of wild rose bushes near the bank of the creek. It was a situation sufficiently panicky. Buff hardened his heart like a fox hunter riding at a bullfinch with a bad take-off, and crawled on.

Twenty feet from the willows he heard a rustling in the tall grass growing between the trunks, and caught a momentary sight of a dark brown shape. He flattened down, aimed his rifle, and waited while a man might draw three breaths. Then, its neat coat of dark brown hair almost concealing its defensive armament of gray-tipped quills, a large porcupine sedately marched out from among the willows.

The appearance of the porcupine clinched what the alighting of the jay had hinted at. There was no one lying concealed in the willow growth. Probably there was no one in the immediate vicinity.

Buff rose, and lowered the hammer of his rifle to the safety notch. The jay took instant flight. The porcupine waddled hurriedly away. Buff walked in among the willows.

He speedily found a spot where a man had evidently been lying on the grass. The bent blades were just beginning to straighten.

Buff knelt down and began to search about in the grass. Within five minutes he had picked up two forty-five-ninety cartridge cases and another cigarette butt. The tobacco was wrapped in the same corn paper as the one that came ashore at his feet. With his finger nail he picked open the paper. He discovered that the tobacco was long-cut and black. He held it to his nose. It smelled like Louisiana perique.

Carefully he tucked tobacco and paper into an empty tobacco bag that he had with him, and stowed it away in a vest pocket. The cartridge cases he dropped into another pocket. There was nothing distinctive about the cases; but Buff was not one to overlook any evidence, however flimsy.

He began to quarter the ground round about, looking for the place where the man's horse had been tied. After a long search he was on the point of breaking off when mere chance led him to look over the edge of the steep bank above the strip of beach—beach, that is, when the creek was low. Now, at high water, it was, as he expected, completely submerged; but — and this he had not expected—the freshet of the previous spring had made a rounded bar in the V between the bank and a fallen cottonwood. Two or three inches of this bar stood above the water line, making a patch of fairly dry ground two yards long by a yard wide, and offering, by virtue of the thick-foliaged cottonwood, whose main roots still clung to the bank, perfect concealment for even so large an object as a horse.

Deeply indented hoof marks on this strip of ground showed where a horse had stood. Abrasions on a root projecting from the bank showed where the bridle reins had been tied; but these things did not interest Buff so much as the prints of a man's booted feet.

There were a dozen or more of these prints. Some of them overlay others, but five were as plain to see as print on a page. One especially—a print of the right foot—was a very autograph; for the outline of the sole, instead of turning to the left, as it ordinarily would, bent to the right. The wearer of that boot had a twisted foot.

The Twisted Foot!

An electric thrill tingled the length of Buff's spine. The hair rose at the back of his neck like the hackles of a bandog, as he instantly dropped behind the bush at his elbow. For he recalled the circumstances linking the saddleblankets to the Twisted Foot, that arch criminal of the Territory, who was frequently felt but rarely seen, and then only for the barest of snatched glimpses.

From the shelter of the bush Buff inspected the opposite shore with eyes that glittered. He could not understand why the Twisted Foot should devote so much attention to his insignificant self, unless the man were in league with Tresawna. This was improbable, for the Twisted Foot was a lone wolf, and, moreover, he had never been known to rustle so much as a calf.

Pondering this incongruity, Buff glanced along the top of the bank upon which he was lying. To the left was a log, the remains of a blasted cottonwood. It suddenly struck him that the grass between the log and a fringe of willows growing on the edge of the bank bore evidences of trampling. He crawled over to the log, and discovered unmistakable signs of two people having recently — very recently — been there.

One person had been sitting on the log. By the boot marks on the grass, the person had sat for at least an hour—probably not much longer. The grass and earth under the footprints were still wet with the moisture of the night. These marks were small, and had been made by the boots of either a small-footed man or a woman.

A yard creekward from the log, under a willow, was a small rock. In front of this rock were other bootmarks, indicating that the individual making them had been sitting on the rock for about the same length of time as his vis-à-vis on the log. Once again Buff's spinal column tingled, for the mark made by the sitter's right boot was unmistakably that of the Twisted Foot.

Nosing onward, Buff found behind the log a heavily trampled space, where the Twisted Foot had apparently camped all night—all night, because the spot where he had made his bed was absolutely dry. Farther on still was cropped grass in a twenty-foot circle about an old alder stub. Here his horse had been tied for the night. To the same tree, after the shod horse of the Twisted Foot had been led away, a barefooted horse had been tied for not much longer than an hour. The footprints of its rider were plain to read.

Buff reconstructed what had happened. The Twisted Foot had made a fireless camp. In the morning he had saddled and led his horse from the tree to which it had been tied all night, down the bank, to the bar inside the fallen cottonwood. Then had come the other rider, the woman or small-footed man, who had tied her or his horse to the same tree, and then had sat down on the log and held an hour's conversation with the Twisted Foot. After that, this person had returned to the alder stub, untied the horse, and ridden away.

Of one thing Buff was certain—this mysterious small-footed person was not Tresawna. The footprints were much too small.

As yet Buff had found only four cigarette butts made with the black tobacco and the saddleblanket papers. He wondered if the person who had sat on the log smoked. He began to poke about in the untrampled grass behind the log, in search of possible evidence. His quest was not rewarded by cigarette butts, but under the curve of the log he found something else—a handkerchief, tightly wadded into a ball. Carefully he opened up and spread out the handkerchief on the ground. Then he caught his breath with a gasp, for the handkerchief had a blue, three-striped border. The first time he saw Gilian she was wearing just such a handkerchief knotted around her neck; and he recalled that when he saw her in the field that morning, her neck was bare.

Then came a reaction.

"It can't be Gilian!" he told himself. "What truck could she have with the Twisted Foot?"

There were the marks of the small boots, and there was the handkerchief—a most uncommon handkerchief; but there must be others of that pattern. There were other woman's-size boots, too. The doubt began to ooze from his heart.

Before he folded the handkerchief, however, it began to flow back with renewed force; for he recalled an oddity in one of the hoof marks of the barefooted horse ridden by the person with the small feet. The print of the wall of one of the hoofs—which one he did not remember—was not continuous. There was a break in its curve about two inches from the heel.

Now Gilian's bay was barefooted, and, the last time he saw it, it had such a break on the outside of one of its fore hoofs. If his memory was correct, it was not a quarter crack—which usually occurs on the inside of the hoof, where the wall is weaker—but a simple break in the wall.

Squatting on his heels, Buff stared miserably at the plot of trampled ground around the alder stub. He knew that he must examine those hoofprints once more, and he dreaded what he might find—what he felt sure he would find. Other horses had breaks in their hoofs, but—

Lugubriously, heavily, his heart a dull, pounding ache, he crawled across to the alder stub and subjected the marks to another examination. When he finished, the sunshine had pretty well gone out of his world. It was the near fore of the barefooted horse that had the break in the wall of its hoof.

He had tried to delude himself that it was a hind hoof, but he was too much of a horseman for that. He knew better, and, knowing better, there was nothing for it but to pursue his investigation to its logical end. If the telltale break in the hoof wall was on the near *forefoot* of Gilian's horse, the matter would be clinched beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Indeed, in Buff's mind, the question was clinched already. The evidence was too terribly convincing.

After a time—how long a time he did not know—he decided to visit the gully where he had left Tresawna.

XIII

Buff parted the bush leaves slightly and looked down upon Andy Tresawna. The gambler, his back to Buff, was solemnly playing solitaire.

"A red seven!" he was muttering, stripping off the cards three at a clip and turning them over. "A red jack! Come a black king! Here he is—the red and one-eyed jack; and," he added, raising his voice, "there's a two-eyed jack looking through that bush right over my head!"

For a breath Buff was taken aback—long enough to give Tresawna the opportunity to drawl insultingly:

"I was wondering how soon you'd be here. That's why I propped my little pocket mirror in front of me. Who's doing all the shooting, Buff?"

All the while Tresawna was making his card combinations.

"Who's your friend?" demanded Buff, accepting the situation.

"Friend!" exclaimed Tresawna in a slightly louder voice. "I haven't any friend here."

The last word of the sentence was uttered in a tone audible at a hundred yards.

"Never mind trying to call him back," Buff enjoined the gambler. "You yell like that again, and you'll strain something besides your voice!"

"Can't I talk?" grumbled Tresawna, his head bent, his hands busy with the cards.

"No need to."

"Well, I like that!" he exclaimed, pivoting on one hip to face Buff.

The latter noticed that the gambler had washed his face. Except a swelled nose and a black eye, there was little to show that he had recently been run through the mill.

"You may have me hog-tied and helpless," Tresawna went on, "but it ain't necessary to rub it in. I don't know what's the matter with you, Buff. Anybody would think you owned the earth. You've got more nerve than anybody I know. I—"

"Shut up!" Buff interrupted in a whisper, aiming his revolver at the same time.

Tresawna's mouth continued open. He was plainly of two minds whether to obey; but the cold eyes behind the six-shooter were too convincing. He closed his mouth.

It was at this juncture that a stick snapped not twenty yards in the rear of Buff. The latter saw it all in a flash—saw the trap they had prepared in order to make sure of him—saw it as he jumped off the bank almost on top of Tresawna.

The latter, in a flurry, jerked a derringer from under his vest and fired point-blank at Buff. Almost at the same instant the puncher shot him in the head. The gambler swayed sidewise, dropped the derringer, clapped both hands to his head, and crumpled to the ground.

Buff scooped up the fallen derringer, dropped it into his pocket, and ran up the gully to a low place in the cut bank.

As he placed the flat of his hand on the top of the bank, preparatory to vaulting up, a rifle cracked in the underbrush and a bullet smacked dirt in his eyes. Buff promptly abandoned this particular spot, and, blinking rapidly, fled onward along the gully like a wild thing—which he was, in more senses than one.

Where the gully bent to the north and came out upon the flat, beside a tiny mound, out of which grew two fair-sized cottonwoods, he flung himself down.

Bang! Thud! A bullet ripped through one of the cottonwoods not six inches over his head, showering his back with splinters. Buff flattened his long body behind the mound. Again the rifle spoke. A bullet scored the earth at one side of the mound, where his feet would have been, if he hadn't had the presence of mind to pull them up.

Once more the rifle sent its message; and now the bullet tucked into the ground at the other end of the mound, within six inches of Buff's head.

"Treed!" Buff said to himself. "Treed! I can't move ahead, back, or sidewise!"

Doubling the brim of his hat, he held it by his finger tips, and slowly elevated the crown above the grass growing on the top of the mound. Nothing happened.

He moved the hat to and fro. With foolhardy bravado he swept a hand in an arc above the mound. This piece of impertinence was well-nigh disastrous. The enemy's weapon made instant response to the challenge, and Buff felt a sharp pain shoot through his hand and wrist that numbed his arm to the elbow.

At first he thought he was wounded; but it was only a pebble, thrown up by the bullet, that had struck him.

Buff tenderly massaged his nerveless fingers, and reflected upon his own crass folly. He would have liked to return to the gully. There, at least, were banks, behind which a man could stand; but between the gully and the mound were six feet of bare ground open to the enemy's fire, and Buff decided to remain where he was.

He yearned to take a shot at his enemy. Judging by the sound, the rifleman was not more than fifty yards away. Buff wriggled ahead slightly. Carefully he pushed his gun muzzle forward. Then he changed his mind, and, squirming round, prepared to try a left-handed shot from the other end of the mound. He conjectured that his ill-wisher would not be expecting one from that end.

In this he was mistaken. Hardly had his gun barrel begun tentatively to part the grass stems when a bullet parted them in sheer earnest.

Buff stared bitterly at a clump of trees on his right, marking a spring. It was not more than three hundred yards away, and it could be reached from the trees lining the creek without being seen. If the man did the obvious thing, and made himself snug in the clump, Buff would be in a remarkably tight hole; for he would be unable to tell, till fired on, whether the man had changed position or remained where he was.

Buff brought forth his pocket knife and began to scrape out a hole in the ground. He realized painfully that the several hours to be dragged through before sunset would be packed with excitement sufficient for three men. If he could hold out till dark, he had nothing to fear; but "if" is a tremendous word. Buff worked his knife a little faster.

A distant shout smote his eardrums. He stared eastward, and the dipping white tilt of a wagon met his eye. As he looked, it reeled down into a gully. Another shout, and the thin crack of a whip. The heads of two straining horses appeared, to be followed by the white tilt aforesaid.

"Cap'n Burr!" muttered Buff, recognizing the wagon and team as those belonging to a tin peddler of his acquaintance. "He's heading straight for this gully. If my quick-shooting friend ever cuts down on him—"

He rolled over on his side and cupped his hands to shout:

"Hi, cap'n! Cap'n! G'way from here!"

It is doubtful whether, above the creaking rattle of the wagon and the clashing clatter of his stock in trade, the captain heard the warning shout. He kept on coming.

The murderous person among the cottonwoods fired a shot that kicked up the dirt slightly to the left of the advancing team. The captain pulled up. There came another shot, which bored the ground on the right. Captain Burr stood up on the dashboard and peered ahead from beneath a flattened palm.

A third shot sang over Buff's head, and must have served the captain likewise, for he sat down abruptly, swung his horses to the right, and sent them into their collars with voice and lash.

"I'll bet he's mad!" was Buff's inward comment. "He'll have to drive two miles out of his way to reach the next ford!"

He watched the tin peddler's wagon disappear behind the clump of trees that marked the spring. When it disappeared, the noise of its passage ceased.

"I guess maybe he ain't in such a hurry to reach the next ford, after all," muttered Buff to his Winchester.

Five minutes later the surmise was proved correct by the heavy roar of a Sharp's buffalo gun.

The captain, although an excellent and up-to-date business man, was reactionary to his finger tips in the matter of offensive weapons. He clung to the Sharp's buffalo, the Spencer carbine, the sawed-off Greener of the gold days, and the bowie evolved from a file. His sole concession to modernity in arms of precision was a forty-five Colt's revolver.

The Sharp's was preëminently his favorite. As he frequently observed, when cleaning and oiling his pet:

"She's only a single-shot, but she sho' makes 'em sick!"

Buff grinned with delight as the buffalo roared again. The captain was evidently striving to "make 'em sick."

"I'll have to do something now my own self," was his thought.

He wriggled around, and, seizing the opportunity when his enemy was replying to the captain's challenge, bounced out from behind the mound and dived down into the gully like a homing woodchuck. Quick as he was, the other man almost dropped him with a bullet that whined within a foot of his head.

"We've got him now!" was Buff's conclusion, as he ran to the low place from which he had been driven earlier in the day.

But his judgment was too sanguine. Even as he shoved his gun barrel above the edge of the bank, he heard a sounding splash in the creek.

Instantly he began to run down the gully at top speed. The body of Tresawna was lying across the gully. Taking it in his stride, Buff was checked in mid air by the suddenly upflung arm and hand of the apparently lifeless gambler—checked in mid air and spilled ignominiously on his face.

His rifle had flown from his hand as he fell. When he scrambled to his feet, he saw it, butt upward, the muzzle rammed five inches deep in the soft earth of the cut bank.

Here was a decided contretemps. With a sanded barrel, the rifle was useless. Shaken somewhat by this, but more by Tresawna's seeming resurrection from the dead, Buff dragged out his six-shooter and ran on to where the gully opened out on the shore of the creek.

He was in time to catch a tantalizing glimpse of a shadowy figure disappearing behind a willow bush on the farther bank. Buff at once threw five shots into that willow bush. Somebody laughed, harshly, derisively. Branches snapped and crackled before the impulse of a large, rapidly moving body. A horse's hoofs began to drum upon the earth. The sound dwindled and died.

Buff lifted up his voice and shouted for Captain Burr.

"Who's there?" called a voice from the bushes some forty yards down stream.

"It's me, cap'n—Buff Warren."

"What you shootin' at me fo'?"

"I wasn't shootin' at you, cap'n. Come on, and I'll explain."

Captain Burr, a wiry, brisk, little man, jumped off the bank and landed in the bed of the gully with all the elasticity of a man of one-third his years.

"Howdy, Buff?" said he, and shook hands ceremoniously. "How do I find you?"

"Alive. I'm glad you came."

"My only regret is that I did not arrive sooneh. Who's the otheh man?"

"Tresaw—oh, him? I only saw about three inches of his back and the upper part of one boot."

"I'm sorry. I was in hopes that between the two guns we could teach the damned scoundrel a lesson! Fah be it from me, suh, to thrust myself upon another gentleman's private quarrel; but when I am shot at, honeh compels me to reply. I trust you will not take my intrusion unkindly."

"Don't apologize, cap'n. If you hadn't come, I don't know what kind of a time I'd have had."

"Of co'se you would have shot him eventually," the captain insisted gallantly. "What had the ruffian done?"

"Outside of shootin' at me, I don't know a thing against him. I think he's a friend of Tresawna's."

"That's something else against him, at any rate. Is that Tresawna yonder?"

Buff nodded.

"I thought I'd killed him, but I guess I was mistaken."

"I hope not," said the captain frankly. "I've always thought Tresawna would stand hanging. It may be hanging, after all. I just saw his foot move. Shall we stroll up and look him oveh?"

Before they reached Tresawna, the gambler raised his hand and arm in the same gesture that had tripped Buff.

"Mahk the fo'ce of habit, suh," observed the captain. "He thinks he's dealin' the cahds."

He sank down on his knees beside Tresawna, and ran expert fingers over the man's scalp. His hand halted, the fingers prodded. He looked up at Buff Warren.

"Youah bullet grazed his skull ratheh deeply, but I'm afraid he will recoveh. If you will get me some wateh, Buff, I'll cut away his hair and put on a compress and a bandage."

XIV

The captain dropped a rawhide pull-through down the barrel of his Sharp's, and began to wipe out the gun with great care. His small, neat, white beard was fairly bristling with indignation.

Buff was squatting on his heels beside Tresawna, who, limp as the proverbial rag, palely green beneath his tan, his head tied up in his own bandanna, was sitting propped against the bank.

"Wohds fail me," remarked the captain, cocking an angry eye at the gambler. "A rustleh desehves no mehcy!"

"I was going to see him later," explained Buff, "when he pulls around again. No use taking it to court, cap'n. Outside of a kid, I'm the only witness, and you know how hard it is to tie a charge of rustling onto anybody. He could claim the cattle were going his way, and he was riding along behind them."

Captain Burr's teeth shone in a wolfish smile.

"Ouah co'ts ah lamentable, and the law they deal in is wo'se; but I have in my wagon a brand-new rope. Theah is an excellent selection of trees hereabout. Heah ah the three of us. What mo' could a gentleman ask?"

"I tell you," burst forth Tresawna, "it's just like Buff says! I only happened to be going along the same way as the cattle!"

"It was an unfo'tunate happening," said the captain smoothly. "It won't occur again."

"But look here, cap'n!" Tresawna persisted desperately. "I don't mind taking chances against a gun, but I don't like the idea of being hung!"

"I don't see why. They say it's a right easy death—like drownin'."

Tresawna shuddered.

"But—"

"Now, now, don't get excited, Tresawna. You ain't been actin' like you should. Even if you weren't tryin' to rustle these particular cattle, you've been mighty active otheh ways. Why, to my cehtain knowledge, since you've been in the country, you ain't done nothin' but steal and lie and cheat and vote the Prohibition ticket!"

"I ain't fit to die!" groaned Tresawna.

"Yes, you ah," insisted the captain. "You know what I think? I think you ah only makin' excuses to get off. You ought to be ashamed of you'self. You ah makin' a lot of fuss oveh nothing. I'll guarantee to bury you afte'wahds, and mahk the spot so yo' friends can find you."

Tresawna tried to throw himself on his knees. He only succeeded in groveling. He scrabbled about with his hands between the captain's boots. He made incoherent, animal sounds. He wept.

"Tell you what, Andy," said the captain, with his wicked smile. "Tell us who your friend was, make a clean breast of the whole job, and maybe it won't be necessary to stretch you."

"No, no, I can't!" cried Andy, and continued to scrabble and weep.

The captain stood up and drew away with distaste. He wound his pull-through on two fingers and tucked the rawhide away in his pocket.

"I might as well get the rope," he said to Buff.

Buff was fairly aghast at the unexpected turn events had taken. He had no desire that Tresawna should be pumped. He feared that disaster for Gilian lay that way. At all costs she must be protected; but how, with the brisk captain talking rope?

"Wait a shake, cap'n," Buff said, determined to prevent the tin peddler from satisfying his fell desire to rid the world of a rascal. How to fob off without arousing his suspicions, Buff did not know. With a gentleman like the captain it was a problem. "Wait a shake, cap'n."

"Gawd bless you, Buff!" yammered Tresawna, transferring his attentions to Buff's boots. "You won't let him hang me? You'll stand by me, won't you, Buff?"

This from his would-be murderer! Buff observed with some curiosity the amazing spectacle of Tresawna. He wondered greatly that a man who had previously displayed a fair amount of courage should react so strongly to the suggestion of death by the rope. It was a thing worth knowing.

"I don't know why we should wait," grumbled Captain Burr. "He's guilty as hell!"

"I think he's more valuable alive than dead. If we don't hang him, there's always a chance he'll talk," Buff insisted, trusting that this would be the last thing Tresawna would do.

"Then let him talk," said the captain. "Give it a name, Tresawna!"

The sweat of terror stood in little drops on Tresawna's low forehead. His eyes were glassy. His mouth trembled. Yet he shook his head.

"I don't know anything," he muttered.

"You'd better speak out," advised the captain.

Tresawna shook his head. He no longer groveled. He sank back against the cut bank.

"Why waste time thisaway?" said the captain.

An ague seized Tresawna. He trembled from head to foot, but his jaw muscles stood out with the strain of his locked jaws.

"I suppose we might as well," assented Buff.

The captain departed for his brand-new rope. When he was gone, Tresawna opened his eyes.

"You ain't going to hang me, Buff!" he said in a shaky voice. "You can't do that, any more than you could shoot me when I was down."

"You tried to shoot me when I was down," replied Buff, struggling with his problem.

"That's different," Tresawna had the brazenness to say. "I ain't like you—not at all. You can't hang me, Buff! You won't let the captain do what you won't do, will you?" Then, as Buff's face remained impassive, he added: "You'd have let me go if it wasn't for Cap'n Burr. You know damned well you would!"

"Taken you to jail, more likely, after this last trick you tried to turn!"

"But you wouldn't hang me! You wouldn't do that! Say you wouldn't, Buff! And don't let the captain! Don't let him, Buff!"

"Well," drawled Buff slowly, "it don't look right to hang you, somehow. I'll talk to the captain, Andy. I'll do what I can."

Tresawna immediately began to bespatter him with gratitude.

Buff barely heard what the gambler said. He had nearly decided that the best plan would be to permit Tresawna to escape then and there.

While he was still pondering the merits of the plan, Joe Mack, the sheriff of Farewell County, rode into the gully. Tresawna immediately took heart of grace.

"I guess the captain won't hang me now," said he to Buff.

"This seems to be your lucky day," admitted Buff, wishing that he had not consumed so much time in formulating his plan for getting Tresawna out of the way.

The sheriff rode up, checked his horse, and greeted the two politely. Then his eyes fastened on Tresawna.

"Hurt bad, Andy?"

"Scratch, Joe. This fellah here, Buff Warren, and Cap'n Ben Burr are fixin' to hang me."

The sheriff's brows drew together. He was invariably strong for law and order when the said law and order did not in any way conflict with the concerns of the vested interests.

"Where's Cap'n Burr?" he asked.

"Gone for a rope," said Buff.

"I guess that rope won't be used today," the sheriff declared importantly. "Not while I'm here. You ought to know better, Buff. Can't allow folks to take the law into their hands thisaway. It ain't legal, and it gives the county a bad name. If you wanted to rub him out, you should shoot him deeper and harder, or—what's Tresawna done, anyway?"

"I caught him rustling a cow and a calf, ten heifers, and a bull."

"You did, huh? That's bad, Andy. I'll have to take you along with me. Rustling cattle is something that has got to be stamped out—you can stick a pin in that. When you go back, Buff, you might as well tell Sam Caltrop I took Tresawna with me. The hearing will be to-morrow. You'll have to appear, Buff. Better ask Sam to come with you."

Buff shook his head.

"I'll be there, but I don't think Sam Caltrop will. You see, Joe, they weren't his cattle."

"Whose cattle were they?" the sheriff asked quickly.

"Man by the name of Fair."

"Fair? Fair? I don't know any Fairs living around here!"

"He's taken McFluke's old place."

The sheriff frowned.

"I heard there was a nester there. So these are his cattle!"

"Yeah."

The sheriff scratched his shaven chin and looked down his long nose at the curling ends of his sweeping mustache. He wished that he had not made such a fine gesture in the matter of Farewell County rustling. Caltrop's cattle were one thing, but a nester's beasts were quite different. The sheriff swore inwardly and heartily damned the infernal luck.

"It 'll be kind of hard making a rustling charge stick," he said slowly, and then added, with meaning, "for a nester's little bunch."

"It 'll be no harder than for a big company bunch," Buff declared sharply; "and that's hard enough, Gawd knows!"

"Any other witnesses besides you, Buff?"

"I'm the only one except a kid."

"Kid's evidence ain't ever worth much. What brand are the cattle carrying?"

"None."

"No brand, only you as a witness, and nester's stuff into the bargain! The case won't even go to trial, Buff. The judge will turn him loose at the hearing. It's hardly worth while my taking him in."

"But you will take him in—unless the law doesn't apply to nesters' cattle."

"Of course it applies," the sheriff exclaimed testily. "What makes you think it doesn't?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. What time is the hearing?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"I'll bring the kid, too."

"It's hardly necessary, Buff. I know about what the judge will say; but bring the kid if you want to. Howdy, cap'n? How are you this fine day?"

"I ain't feelin' so good," grumbled the captain, fondling with affectionate fingers the stiff coils of a thirty-five-foot rope. "I don't have to be a mind readeh to know what you ah goin' to do. I don't know when I've been less glad to see anybody, sheriff!"

The sheriff laughed.

"Of course, if I hadn't happened to come along, I don't know that there'd have been any particular objection to you stretching Tresawna. Irregular, maybe, but such things will happen. I'm broad-minded enough to see that, I hope, just like you see I can't let you hang Andy right under my eyes. He'll have his hearing to-morrow, Andy will."

"I'll bet they tuhn him loose," grieved the captain.

"I'm bettin' that way myself," concurred the sheriff; "but of course the law has to be complied with. That's what I'm here for, you know. Your wagon anywhere around, captain?"

"Down by the spring."

"I'd take it as a favor if you'd drive up here, so we can carry Tresawna to town."

The captain was understood to curse Tresawna and all his works, adding:

"And I lose a trip, besides. I was bound out."

"Can't be helped," insisted the sheriff. "I've got to get Andy to town soon as possible."

The captain swore again, remarking in his rage that there was no justice any more, anywhere. He departed, still swearing, and Buff went with him.

"Did you tell Joe about what Tresawna and the otheh man tried to do to you, Buff?" asked the captain, untying his team.

"No, I didn't. That part is between Tresawna, the other fellah, and me," replied Buff.

"And me," amended the captain softly. "You must not deny me this simple pleasure, suh. I am getting on in years, and it is only such little incidents as these that keep my bones and interest alive; but you are right not to tell the sheriff. The quarrel is ouahs, and ouahs alone."

"I don't want to drag you in, cap'n."

"Not another word, suh—not another word! Heah's some baling wiah, Buff, to clean yo' rifle with. Bettah luck next time. Damn it, suh, I never saw any one so stubborn as Andy Tresawna! If the sheriff hadn't come along, I honestly believe we'd have had to hang him."

Buff, cleaning his rifle, wondered what the captain would have said had he known he had been exchanging shots with the Twisted Foot. Were it not for the incriminating handkerchief in his pocket, the puncher would have told his ally; but where Gilian was concerned his mouth was shut. That part of the case he intended to handle himself. Neither the law nor any one else, if he could help it, should have lot or part in it.

Tresawna? Another loose end. But Buff did not believe that the gambler, with the fear of death by the rope removed, even though jail should hold him for a time, would be likely to weaken to the extent of actual blabbing.

Buff returned to the Fair place on the Lazy that afternoon. What he would do with the evidence, when he found the last link, he did not know. To go straight to Gilian with it would be the best plan—a man's job, too; but he did not relish the idea.

Fording the river above the house, and passing through the cottonwoods, he saw that the potential cornfield had been completely harrowed, and that Mrs. Fair, Jemima, and the twins were planting the seed. All four were working like nailers.

He could not see Gilian's horse. There were the mules, hobbled, grazing down by the river. Farther on were the cattle, solemnly cropping, with their heads all turned one way. A thin smoke was rising behind the stable and sheds.

He rode past the house, ascended the ridge, turned the corner of a shed, and saw Gilian's bay horse tied short by the head to a wheel of a wagon. Gilian, her hair in a hastily twisted club, one of the bay's hind legs gripped tightly between her youthful knees, was tacking on a shoe.

As he came up, she threw him a quick, frowning glance, and reached for the clinching iron.

"Let me do that," he managed to say, dismounting.

"This is the last hoof," said she, clinching the nails with an expert hammer.

He saw that it was indeed the last hoof, and that in none of the hoofs, either inside or outside, fore or hind, was there the slightest indication of a break. What evidence there had been, if any, was safely concealed in the parings and nippings of horn that lay scattered about.

If Gilian had wished to destroy evidence, she could not have done a better job. Part of the blacksmith's remedy for a corn is paring and rasping down the sole and wall of the quarter, so that when the shoe is clinched no portion of the cut down section shall bear upon the shoe, thus relieving all pressure on the corn. If there is a break in the wall of the quarter—a simple break, not a sand crack, you understand—this cutting down process removes it effectually.

Buff could not see that Gilian had cut away more of the hoof than was absolutely necessary to relieve an ordinary corn. He was compelled to admit, too, that she had done an expert job. No blacksmith could have given those nails a stronger clinch. She lowered the hoof, stepped away, and tidily gathered up her tools.

"He's been going tender for'ard lately," she said.

"Corns?" said Buff.

She nodded.

"Outside of each fore. That's why we've been letting him go barefoot. It helped him a little, I guess. I only wish I had a bar shoe! A plain shoe springs too much." She went to the horse's head and began to untie him: "Easy, boy, easy! Nobody's going to hurt you."

He watched her jealously, and with despairing admiration. She had kissed him, she had said she wanted him to kiss her, and then she had definitely given him his dismissal. By God, he would not be sent packing!

He saw the sunshine on her bright hair. He was aware of the curves of her neck and chin, the swell of her bosom under the flannel shirt, the movements of her brown, skillful hands. He knew that no matter what she had done, no matter what she was, he loved this girl.

The Twisted Foot! Buff would see that she did not meet him again. Henceforth he would stand between her and whatever sinister influence lay in that direction. On the spur of this exalted mood he resolved to return to her the handkerchief he had found, and to argue her into a reasonable frame of mind. This decision made him feel highly magnanimous and condescending—which is not good for a young man.

"His feet need a good soaking every day," Gilian was saying. "His hoofs are getting brittle. Why, there was a break—"

Buff came back to earth with a severe jar.

"Yes, yes," he broke in hurriedly; "but it doesn't matter. Nothing matters."

"A break in the wall of the quarter of the off fore," went on Gilian, scowling at the interruption. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Not a thing," he told her with a fatuous smile.

She did not return the smile, but continued to scowl.

"I don't know what on earth you had to come traipsing down here for. I told you to keep away, didn't I?"

This was a red-hot shot, but he was not touched. There was something in his pocket that would make her change her tune. Wait until he should give her the handkerchief! He drew it from his pocket.

"I had to come," said he, handing her the handkerchief. "You see, I found this."

She regarded the handkerchief, unmoved.

"You found this, did you? Well, what's it got to do with me?"

"It's yours, isn't it?"

He kept nodding at her, as if to convey that everything was all right with him, and that he would stick by her through thick and thin.

"No," she said sharply. "It is not mine. I have only one handkerchief like this one that I usually wear around my neck. Here it is."

As she spoke, she pulled from the pocket of her skirt a handkerchief precisely similar to the one Buff had found.

"I usually wear it around my neck, but I took it off to-day, it was so hot. I suppose you saw I didn't have it on, and you thought I'd lost it. Then you went and bought this one, so that you could come here on the pretense of returning it to me. Oh, clever, very! How can you be so crude? This makes me sick! Besides, Mr. Warren, all my handkerchiefs have a capital G embroidered in one corner, like this one. The one you—uh—found has no initial on it. Here, take it!"

It was impossible not to believe her. Buff felt as one who has been blown off his feet. He clawed madly for the solid earth.

"But—but," he stammered, "weren't you on Packsaddle Creek this morning?"

"You know perfectly well that I was there with you."

"I mean before that."

She whitened to the lips.

"'Before that!'" she repeated. "Why, no, of course not!"

But now he did not believe her. She was too patently lying. He stepped close to her.

"I can just about guess what's bothering you—" he began.

She recoiled.

"What?" she gasped. "What do you mean?"

"You tell me your trouble, and I'll fix it for you. Leave it to me. I want to help you."

Her eyes narrowed. She had begun to pull herself together. She drew a long breath.

"Have you been spying on me?"

Manlike, he was indignant. Naturally he lied.

"Of course I haven't been spying on you. What do you think I am?"

"I'm not sure whether you're a natural born idiot or a—"

She did not complete the sentence.

"Or a what?" he prompted.

"Never mind! You'd better be going. Too bad the handkerchief isn't mine. Good-by!"

"Well, anyway," he snapped vindictively, "you kissed me back!"

"That's right — fling my folly in my face! Rub it in! Shame me all you can!"

"Damn it, I tell you I love you!"

"Swear at me now! That comes next, I suppose. What a fine, manly person you are! What—"

"Look here!" he broke in desperately, his backbone reduced by her show of passion to the consistency of mush and milk. "Look here, can't you get it into your head that I want to help you all I can?"

"What a fussbudget it is!" she exclaimed, achieving one of her bewildering transitions of mood and expression. "I don't need any help really; but you seem to need soothing. You look a little wild about the eyes. Come on down to supper, and be soothed!"

He followed the girl, uneasily conscious that he was being beguiled, befooled, and bamboozled.

XV

After supper Buff and Mr. Fair sat side by side in chairs tilted back against the wall. The blind man, busy with his own thoughts, smoked in silence—for which Buff was glad. He was in no mood for idle conversation, being in the condition best described as a sorry state of mind.

He had gone through a good deal that day. Excitement, passion, anger, the will to give death or take it—all had swayed him since the dawn. There remained now a curiously flat feeling of bewilderment.

What was the answer to the riddle? Gilian had told him the truth about the handkerchief—of that he was certain; but he was equally certain that she had lied in denying that she had gone to Packsaddle before she followed him there. As to her statement that the quarter break was in the bay's off fore, he did not know what to think; yet, if the first assertion were true, the other two should have been also true. If the last two were lies, so should the first have been. The more he thrashed at the matter in his befogged mind, the more bewildered he became.

From the welter of equivocal circumstance three facts at last emerged—she had desired him to kiss her at least once, she loved no one else, and she needed help. Above all, she needed help. The seeming contradictions of the case, her distress, her very denial that she needed aid, were as instinct with the call to lend a hand as minute guns at sea.

But how? How do you save people who refuse to be saved? Buff did not know, but he was a hopeful soul. If he could get Gilian off by herself for ten minutes, away from the bothering family, it might be possible to make her see his side of it.

If he could only kiss her again! The memory of their first kiss filled his veins with wild fire. His heart beat to suffocation. He caught his breath, and stirred on the chair. She had kissed him back! That was everything.

He watched her with her mother and sister, as she wiped the supper dishes, and marveled that she could talk and laugh with such light-hearted abandon.

"She's sure game!" he told himself.

Suddenly Mrs. Fair began to speak of the impending trial, and Buff was forced to wrench his thoughts from Gilian. Later, when she went out, he rose to follow, but Mrs. Fair stopped him with—

"Oh, Mr. Warren, would you mind looking at the shotgun? It doesn't seem to eject properly."

He inspected the shotgun. So far as he could see, the mechanism worked perfectly. He said as much, but Mrs. Fair was not satisfied, nor was Jemima. They kept him fiddling with it for a good fifteen minutes.

After that it was the churn that needed his expert attention. He knew enough about churns to perceive at once that it was in as perfect order as was the shotgun. Under Jemima Fair's eye he perforce took the infernal thing apart.

Jemima stepped into the next room for a moment. Mrs. Fair was at the stove, with her back toward him. Beside Buff was an open window. Quietly he laid the elmwood dasher on the chair and slipped over the window sill. Once in outer darkness, he stooped, quietly removed his spurs, stuffed them into a pocket, and stood listening.

Near the Lazy, a young heifer bawled for her mother. Somewhere in the cottonwoods sounded the swishing swoop of mighty wings, followed by a queerly human cry of distress. An owl had caught a cottontail. A night-flying beetle blundered into Buff's face, and caromed off, buzzing angrily. Somewhere upon the ridge a horse stamped—his horse, probably. He moved up the slope of the ridge, and called softly:

"Gilian!"

But no Gilian made reply. The owl hooted eerily, the lonely heifer bawled again, and there was silence.

He retraced his steps and started in the direction of the cornfield. Tink! On the west side of the field a shot hoof clinked against a rock. One of the mules, or the bay, must have strayed in that direction. Buff halted irresolutely. He whispered sharply:

"Gilian!"

The night was very still. He listened. Was that the murmur of Gilian's voice? He thought it was. It seemed to come from the place where the shoe had clinked.

The murmur ceased, only to be followed by another vague murmur in a distinctly different voice. Buff bethought him that, greatly as he desired to find Gilian, he could not eavesdrop; but—with whom was she talking?

The green demon of jealousy sat upon his shoulder, twirling its tail. That other and personal devil, his conscience, sat up and took notice on the other shoulder.

"Suppose it is the Twisted Foot over yonder?" hinted the personal devil. "It is your duty as a citizen to investigate, and to act accordingly."

"Suppose it isn't?" demurred a third demon—Buff's better nature.

"In that case there would be no harm done," smoothly declared the personal devil. "One must not allow one's finer feelings to conflict with one's manifest duty to the community."

"My colleague has the right of it," declared the green devil. "Your plain duty, my friend, is to march forward in the interests of truth, to strike hard and often, and to abolish this person who is meeting your love by the light of the moon!"

There did not happen to be any moon, but, like the *March Hare,* devils invariably use the best butter.

"If it is somebody else," drawled the third devil, "she won't thank you for the intrusion."

"She won't thank you anyway," slipped in the green demon.

"Better not risk it," counseled the third devil. "This is a delicate matter. My advice is to wait. Everything will eventuate happily."

"You are wrong!" passionately declared that conscientious objector, the casuistical devil. "If it really is the Twisted Foot, and you continue to delay, you will lose the opportunity of a lifetime. Hurry, my dear sir, hurry!"

"Wait! Wait!" agonized the third devil.

Buff waited, a prey to his mixed emotions. While he waited, he heard, from the direction of the house, the sound of flying feet. He could not go forward without running into Gilian and her conversational friend. He could not go back. He crouched where he was, at the edge of the cornfield, hoping painfully that he would not be seen.

The owner of the flying feet fled past him at a distance of about three yards. It was Jemima, running in the direction of the voices. Buff, hot and cold with shame at his predicament, did not dare to budge. Mrs. Fair might be following the girl.

For what seemed an eternity he crouched, with one knee on a pebble that grew sharper and sharper with the lagging flight of time. He moved the knee, lost his balance, threw out a hand to save himself, and clapped it down on a recumbent thistle. His ensuing involuntary movement made some little noise.

"Is that you, Gil?" inquired a voice, in a restrained whisper.

Buff made no reply. He snuggled to the earth, and incidentally to the thistle. The voice repeated the question. The owner of the voice was Mrs. Fair. She was between him and the house, and was coming toward him.

She passed by him, so close that he could have put forth an arm and touched her shoe. He put forth nothing save a prayer that she would not see him. She apparently did not, and was swallowed up in the darkness that had swallowed Jemima.

The murmurs of voices had ceased. Shoe iron clinked once, twice, and again. Then Buff heard a sudden scramble and a smack. A nervous horse was being mounted. There came the dull, low thumps of trotting hoofs on grass, a distant clink, and a faint thump. Then some one off there in the darkness began to cry. It was a woman.

This was too much. Buff, holding his breath, decided to risk the twins, and crawled like a crab toward the house. He entered the kitchen quite as if nothing had happened, and took up the elmwood dasher. The twins, sitting at the table, their heads touching, were laboriously spelling out the news of the world in a six-weeks-old Kansas City *Star.* They did not look up at his entrance.

Mr. Fair turned his sightless face toward him. There might have been anxiety in the hesitating smile on his lips.

"I thought I heard you go out," he said.

"Sure you did," confirmed Buff. "I left my knife in a saddle pocket, and had to go after it."

Mr. Fair nodded, as if content with the explanation.

"Yeah—I need a screw driver here, and a knife blade is good as any."

Buff, to lend color to his tale, made noisy play with the knife blade on the metal parts of the dasher. A few minutes later he put it back into the churn.

When the three women came in, fifteen minutes later, Buff was sitting beside Mr. Fair. It may have been a guilty conscience, but it seemed to him that all three looked at him keenly as they entered. That their eyes were red was more than seeming—it was a fact. Another angle of the mystery—why should all three have been weeping together?

Later, Gilian, standing looking down at the twins and their newspaper, suddenly turned her back; but she did not turn quickly enough to hide the two tears that ran down her cheeks.

Buff stood up.

"I've got to be going," he said carefully, and reached for his hat.

Mrs. Fair pressed him to stay for the night, and to go in with them to the trial in the morning; but he would not, and departed, after promising to meet them at court. He rode away, his brain in a tumult.

Under the soothing influence of Buster's steady walk-along, he gradually began to think more clearly, but to little purpose. Plan after plan for helping Gilian and solving the mystery of the Twisted Foot he evolved and rejected. Many were discarded because of their obvious impracticability, others because money was needed for their furtherance, and he had no money. When he reached Farewell, he had thought of nothing practical.

As he rode into town, he heard Calloway's roosters flap their wings and sound their midnight call. He drew out his watch and held the glowing tip of his cigarette over the face. It was ten minutes after midnight. However, three places of business were brightly lit—the Starlight and Happy Heart Saloons, and the Dewdrop Dance Hall.

Three gentlemen, likewise brightly lit, were sitting on the edge of the sidewalk in front of the Happy Heart. With their arms entwined affectionately about each other's necks, and stamping the time with their spurred heels in the dust of the street, they were caroling the cowland ditty of old Sam Clute, which runs in this wise:

"Old Sam Clute was a damned old brute,
And he couldn't get his cattle to the loading chute.
With a hi-yi, and a ki-yi,
And a hi-yi, yippy-yippy-yi!

"For it's gittin' mighty late, and it's gittin' mighty
cold,
And the longhorn cattle are a gittin' mighty old.
With a hi-yi, and a ki-yi,
And a hi-yi, yippy-yippy-yi!"

When the vocalists saw Buff, they hailed him joyously, rushed out into the street, and hauled him from his horse, offering refreshment in three keys. One was his cousin, Bill Holliday, and the other two his friends, Tom Dowling of the Cross-in-a-Box, and the Kid's Twin of the Bar S.

"Good ol' Buffy!" cried his cousin, cleverly jamming Buff's hat over his eyes. "Come have a lil drink!"

"To-morrow," said Buff. "I got business to-night."

"No business done after midnight," declared Tom Dowling with the utmost gravity. "I'll tut-take your hu-horse tut-to the cuc-cuc-cuc-cuc—"

"Flap your wings and you'll get it, ol' rooster," advised the Kid's Twin.

"I ain't a crowin'," denied Tom Dowling indignantly. "I'm a sayin' cuc-cuc-corral. Where's 'at stirrup? Buff's gone and hid stirrup. Nemmine, don't need stirrup."

So saying, he grasped the saddlehorn firmly, and contrived to vault into the saddle, with such success that he fell off on the opposite side. The Kid's Twin celebrated his downfall with shouts and every load in his six-shooter. Bill Holliday must needs emulate him.

Buff would have withdrawn, for he was not amused, had not Tom Dowling, in his efforts to arise, gripped him firmly by the boot tops. Tom, having shinned up Buff's legs to his belt, twisted his fingers in the belt and refused to let go.

"Le's all sing lil song," suggested Tom, in a voice audible at half a mile. "All together now, bub-boys! Make her ring!"

"'Twas in the spring of eighty-three,
Watson Ritch, he hired me;
He says, 'Young feller, I want you to go
And drive this herd to Mexico!'"

Bang, bang, bang, cracked Tom Dowling's six-shooter. It may be that Tom was not as careful in his elevation as he might have been. At any rate, before he and his merry companions had completed the next verse, the sheriff, tucking the tail of his nightshirt into his trousers, descended upon them.

"Look here, boys," said the sheriff in an annoyed tone, "I don't care how much noise you make, or how much powder you burn, but I've got an interest in where your bullets go. Four of 'em just now came through my window, and there's broken glass all over the floor. I like to cut my feet, to say nothin' of gettin' plugged if you'd aimed more to the right. When you shoot, shoot straight up."

"My fuf-fault," Tom Dowling averred penitently. "Nun-next time I'll aim better. I'll shoot to the right, like you sus-said. The drinks are on me. Lil drink, Joe, jus' show nun-no hard feelin'!"

The other two echoed the invitation. They took the sheriff by the arms and propelled him toward the Happy Heart. The sheriff went, not unwillingly; for he was one of the boys, and, with no wife to say him nay, he could take comfort in his liquor.

Buff trailed along with Dowling. He had to. As well shake off a barnacle as the firmly established Mr. Dowling!

Draping his long frame against the bar, Buff found himself between the sheriff and Tom. Bottles and glasses were slid along by that personification of efficiency, the Happy Heart bartender. They drank a round. They drank another round. They drank a third round.

"Cheer up!" cried Tom Dowling, nudging the gloomy Buff with a sharp elbow. "The devil's dead. Have 'nother, ol' race horse!"

Old race horse! It was the term Tom Dowling applied only to those whom he liked very much indeed. It was suddenly borne in upon Buff that his desertion of the cattle fraternity for that of the nesters was making no difference to these three friends of his. They knew, of course. Such news travels fast.

The sheriff turned. It was evident that he must have paid a social call upon his private demijohn before turning in, because the three drinks he had just taken were causing him to take a mighty expansive view of life.

"Race horse," said he, leaning confidentially toward Buff. "Did I hear you say race horse?"

Buff shook his head.

"Tom Dowling said that."

"Tom," said the sheriff, "you got a race horse?"

"I wish I had," was the reply, "thu-then I'd bub-beat that knee-sprung, string-haltin', three-legged hat rack you're always gassin' about!"

"Is that so?" countered the sheriff. "Is that so? Which there ain't a horse in the country can beat that brag horse of mine!"

"Talk's cheap," sneered Dowling.

The sheriff immediately began to produce coin of the realm from every pocket in his pants. Clinking the money on the bar, he stacked it.

"Here!" he shouted. "Here's two hundred dollars says there ain't a horse in the county can beat him any distance up to two miles!"

"If I wasn't broke—" began Dowling.

"Say, Joe, I know a horse can beat yours," interrupted Bill Holliday.

"Whose?" demanded the sheriff.

"My horse Buster—uh—that is, he was mine. I done—uh—sold him to Buff here; but alla same that Buster horse can beat yours any distance up to two miles the best day he ever lived!"

Buff stared at his cousin, perceiving for the first time that he wore a black eye and a puffed lower lip. He did no more than remark these facial adornments in passing, because his mind was taken up with the wild utterances of his cousin's tongue. Buster was a good, speedy animal, but he was not quite in a class with the horse of whose speed and bottom the sheriff was so inordinately proud.

"How about it, Buff?" exclaimed the sheriff, turning away from Bill. "You want to race?"

"I ain't carin'," Buff said slowly. At that instant there was born in his brain the germ of an idea—an idea that promised better things than any he had tried to think out since leaving the Fair place. "I don't want your money, Joe, but I tell you what I do want, and that's a job."

The sheriff, after some difficulty in focusing, fixed him with a glittering eye.

"A job!" he repeated. "How a job?"

"The second deputy's job is still open, ain't it? Yeah, well, that's the job I want. If my horse wins, I get the job and the regular salary."

"I got somebody else in mind."

"Then the race is off."

But the sheriff's sporting blood was up.

"I'll take a chance. If you lose, you don't get a thin dime. If you win, I appoint you second deputy at the regular salary and mileage."

"Good enough! The race to be run tomorrow morning at—"

"Suh-seven o'clock," Bill Holliday struck in swiftly.

"Too early," objected the sheriff.

"Bub-but if you make it later, I won't see it," explained Bill. "I got a 'portant 'gagement at seven thirty."

"Oh, all right," the sheriff gave in. "Seven o'clock goes, if it suits you, Buff. Good enough! It's a whack. I hope you ain't countin' on that job too hard!"

"Not me," said Buff heartily. "It's a cinch you'll win, sheriff."

"Changin' your tune, huh?" bantered the sheriff. "Beginning to wonder how you're going to eat, I expect!"

"I didn't say so," Buff denied tranquilly.

"I should say he didn't say so!" broke in Bill Holliday, whose mobile features had worn an expression of pleased anticipation ever since he had made his apparently rash assertion concerning the Buster horse. "I should admire to say not! Buster, he'll run away like your sewing machine was tied. I got a hundred dollars says so."

"Board it," said the sheriff, and immediately began to count out a hundred from the stack in front of him.

"I don't want your money, either," declared Bill. "My hundred against the other deputy's job, Joe — same terms as Buff's bet."

"I don't need three deputies," demurred Joe.

"Changin' *your* tune now, huh?" sneered Bill. "Ain't so sure you're goin' to win, are you? I always knew that horse of yours was a false alarm!"

"You've made a bet!" snapped the goaded sheriff. "A mile, Buff—the usual distance, from the lone pine beyond Piney Jackson's blacksmith shop to Calloway's store."

Buff shook his head. If there was a chance for Buster to win, it lay in the popular distance for grass-fed horses—two furlongs, a quarter of a mile. Buster was of the Steeldust strain, and the stallion Steeldust was one of the best quarter horses that ever looked through a bridle. Buster's best point was in getting away. If Buff could get the jump, perhaps beat the shot a shade, there was a chance for his horse—not an excellent chance, but a chance.

"No, sheriff," said Buff. "Make it a quarter. Buster's been ridden right smart the last couple of days. Here it is one o'clock in the morning, and he outside in the street, when he ought to be in the corral, taking his rest, with three quarts of oats under his ribs. Make it a quarter. Didn't I hear you say your horse was good any distance up to two miles?"

"You said the same thing about Buster," grumbled the sheriff.

"Bill said that," denied Buff. "It's a quarter, Joe, or the bet's off. What's the matter? Ain't yours quick on the jump?"

"It's a quarter and a bet!" exclaimed the sheriff.

So there was another round. When Buff set his glass down and turned to ask his cousin a question, Bill had disappeared.

XVI

THE inhabitants of Farewell, male and female after their kind, were clustered on both sides of the street by ten minutes to seven o'clock the next morning. The sheriff's horse was the favorite, because it had shown what it could do, while Buster was practically unknown.

Then, too, the sheriff's personal popularity had something to do with the town's feeling. Buff had been well liked in the place, but his taking up with nesters had undoubtedly damaged his standing. Farewell was a cow town, with all that the name implies.

As he rode his horse to the starting point, Buff affected not to notice the unfriendly stares of acquaintances with whom he had once been on a basis of amity. For all that he had expected to be more or less ostracized, the actual experience hurt. He was a friendly soul, and he liked people to like him.

As one with a toothache bites down hard on the offending tooth, Buff checked his horse in front of a party of three—Calloway, the postmaster, Carlson, keeper of the livery stable, and a gambler rejoicing in the felicitous name of Stony Flint. Despite their darkling looks, it was his intention to make them speak to him. Accordingly, he greeted the three cheerfully by name.

Calloway returned the greeting hurriedly, looking anywhere save at Buff. Carlson gave him a grave, noncommittal "good morning." Stony Flint said nothing.

Buff looked straight at the gambler, and repeated his salutation. In the face of this, Stony continued to remain silent; but he could not stare Buff down. Finally his eyes wavered, dropped, and fell.

This was a dangerous mistake. Buff was within easy arm's length of the gambler. The instant that Flint's eyelids lowered, Buff's right arm shot out with the speed of a striking snake, and his long fingers hooked themselves into the man's collar.

The startled Buster side jumped two yards in a flash; but Buff had anticipated this, and had thrown his weight to that side. Stony Flint, jerked off his feet, his face pressed against the harsh leather of Buff's saddle, with Buff's knuckles pushing in his Adam's apple, strangling and wheezing, strove to yank out his gun. Although Buster was sidling all over the street, Buff managed to stay in the saddle, retain his hold of the gambler, and run the barrels of Tresawna's derringer into Flint's right ear.

"Stony," said Buff, "do you want me to wipe you off the census?"

The gambler at once desisted from his frantic efforts to reach his weapon.

"These shoulder holsters ain't always so handy, are they?" went on Buff, in an easy speaking-of-the-weather tone. "You ought to carry a derringer in your vest pocket, the way I do. Then you wouldn't be caught out in the rain thisaway. Stony, I want to ask you two questions. Have you crossed me off your visiting list? If so, why? What's the matter? Cat got your tongue? Speak, damn you, speak!"

But Stony Flint was past speech. He could only guggle. Buff eased up on the throat pressure.

"I'll get you for this!" the gambler snarled thickly.

"Not from where you're standing," countered Buff. "Say 'Howdy,' or—"

Once more he ground the barrels of the derringer into the gambler's ear.

"Ha-howdy," groaned Stony Flint.

"Kind of stuttery," said Buff, "but it will do. I don't want to be hard on you. Take a seat."

So saying, he flung Stony from him with such force that the gambler sat down plump in the middle of the street, the dust puffing up about him in a white cloud.

Released from the extra burden, Buster quieted. Buff, watching the gambler narrowly, sprang the catch of the derringer barrels and broke the gun.

"See, Stony!" he said loudly, for he wanted all the spectators to hear. "See here—the gun ain't loaded. Joke on you, fellah!"

A stifled snicker ran about the crowd. Stony, glaring, his hard face twisted into a mask of diabolical rage, remained where he was for a long minute. Buff's slitted eyes watched him. His right hand had dropped to his side.

Slowly the gambler began to rise to his feet. When he was halfway up, his right hand jerked, and dived under his vest. There followed a flash and a bang, and a bluster of smoke whirled about Buster's head. Stony, shot through the right shoulder, spun half around and fell, his six-shooter dropping from his useless hand.

For a breath he remained quiescent. Then he scrambled up like a toad, and snatched at his weapon with his left hand. Buff instantly drove an accurate bullet through the back of that left hand.

This was the end. Stony Flint collapsed in a writhing huddle—for there are few injuries quite so exquisitely painful as a wound through the hand. Friends came out and carried him away. One stooped to pick up the gambler's six-shooter, but stopped and eyed Buff apprehensively.

"Take it away," said Buff kindly. "You're more than welcome."

Buff spurred Buster to where the sheriff stood, near the starting point.

"Even break, Joe," he said clearly. "He went after his gun first."

"Sure did—I seen him," chipped in Bill Holliday.

"We all did," said Tom Dowling and the Kid's Twin together.

"I saw it myself," averred the sheriff testily. "It's all right. You ain't going to race in that saddle, are you?"

"Sure not," replied Buff, and forthwith dismounted.

Unsaddling, Buff looked over Buster's back at the sheriff's horse. It seemed to him that the animal looked a trifle fat, not to say bloated. Tom Dowling evidently held the same view.

"Got a leetle mite of a grass belly on him, ain't he, Joe?" observed Tom.

"No—oh, no," denied the sheriff. "He ain't been turned out since spring."

The sheriff elected to ride in his socks, Buff in his boots and spurs. Buster, at the barrier—a line drawn in the dust with a neck yoke—fiddled a bit. The crowd, although most of it was grouped at the finish, annoyed him. The sheriff's horse stood like a cow, his head down, his small forefeet close together. The sheriff chucked him into his bridle with a pull at the bit; but he neither pricked his ears nor showed spirit. To Buff, he looked logy.

"Ready, boys?" asked Mike Flynn, the peg-legged owner of the Blue Pigeon Store.

"Ready!" replied the sheriff.

"All set!" said Buff.

Mike raised his six-shooter and pulled the trigger. *Bang!* Buff rammed home the spurs. Buster bounded forward in a deer leap, laid his belly to the ground, and flew.

In that first jump Buff heard at his side an unmistakable squelching sound — the sound a horse's stomach makes when he is galloped with a belly full of water.

Buff, his spurs well home, plying his quirt like a Mexican, took time to doubt the sheriff's sanity. Filling a horse with water was certainly no way to prepare for a race.

Buster had got the jump on the other

horse. In his first leap he had put the racer's white nose level with his own tail. Not till the furlong did the white nose begin to creep up, and then the gaining stopped at Buster's loins.

What though the sheriff yelled encouragement and poured the leather into his horse's flank, the animal gained not another inch. Indeed, when Buster shot over the finish line like a streak of wind-swept scud, the sheriff's horse was daylighted by a good yard.

Buff pulled up and rode back. The sheriff had already dismounted behind the line. He was looking his mount over with eyes in which disgust and surprise were mixed in equal proportions.

"I don't understand it," he was saying to the world at large. "I never knew him to take more than a sip before eight o'clock, or till he's warmed up, and here this morning he's drunk his belly so full he can hardly wiggle!"

"Sure sounded like a water barrel, Joe," said Alicran Skeel, manager of the Hogpen outfit, who had bet on Buster.

"That's what comes of not watchin' over a horse before a race," grumbled Bill Lainey, the fat hotel keeper, who had bet on the sheriff's horse. "If it hadn't been for that water—"

"You wouldn't have lost your two bits," inserted the sheriff swiftly.

"It was five dollars!" Bill Lainey cried indignantly.

"Nemmine, Bill," said Buff. "You can double the prices of your meals and get it all back in a day. Charge it up to the ultimate consumer."

"I dunno," said Bill doubtfully. "Nobody by that name ever ate in my hotel."

Under cover of the laugh that followed, the sheriff went up to Buff.

"You won your bets, you and Bill," said he with good grace. "Come down to the office at nine o'clock, and I'll swear you both in."

When Buff returned to the starting point, his cousin had disappeared. Neither Tom Dowling nor the Kid's Twin knew where Holliday had gone, or what was the nature of his engagement.

When he had seen to the baiting of Buster, Buff went in search of his cousin. After an hour's poking about in both likely and unlikely places, he heard Bill's voice raised in song. He walked down the voice, and located it as proceeding from a cluster of a dozen cottonwoods growing around a small seep in a draw a quarter mile directly in rear of the stage company's corral. Beneath the largest cottonwood he found Bill Holliday comfortably enthroned on an ancient whisky keg. He was alternately drinking from a bottle and singing a verse of a song.

"What you doing here?" demanded Buff.

"Keeping 'portant 'gagement," replied his cousin.

"What you mean?"

With a look of patient weariness, Bill Holliday set the bottle on his knee.

"Mum-member I told the sheriff I had a 'portant 'gagement at seven thirty? This is it." He waved the bottle, and laid a cunning finger alongside his nose. "Tut-told ol' sheriff truth, I did. Habit o' mine, tellin' truth. I'm George B. Washington. Yeah, had to make 'portant 'gagement early, so sheriff have to race soon as possible after horse drunk!"

A great light broke upon Buff.

"Why?" he asked, beginning to grin.

"You ashk mum-me why? Horse drunkard, tha'sh why. Curse of drink ruin many good man—good horse, I mean."

"But what made the horse so thirsty?" persisted Buff.

"Salt," replied the jovial soul on the whisky keg. "Lul-lots of salt. I bub-been stuffin' it down his neck all night in cuc-cuc-corral. Helluva time rope him in dark. He bit me twice, but I done it, y'betcha! Now you got job, I got job, we all got job. Have lil drink?"

Buff declined.

"Whu-why did I want job?" continued Holliday. "I tell you whu-why. You see this black eye? I traded Sus-sam Cuccaltrop two black eyes for it. You see this cut lip? I give Sus-sam bloody nose and knocked out tut-two teeth for it. I sure made Sam sick! Why? I tell you why. Because he cuc-called you a nester. Ain't nobody but me 'lowed cuc-call you nester, and I tol' him so. He got mad. Then Rum cuc-come in after we were all through, and Sam was unconscious, and you never saw a more unreasonable man. I had to work him over with my six-shooter before he'd quit pup-pesterin' me. Have a lil drink? Nun-no? Then I will."

So saying, Bill tilted the neck of the bottle into his mouth.

(*To be continued in the April number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Shadow Hands

A STORY THAT RAISES ONCE MORE AN OLD, OLD QUESTION

By Genevieve Neergaard

"POPPYCOCK!" I exclaimed unconsciously, as I tossed aside the magazine I had been reading and sauntered over to the wide window.

It was curtained in a sliding, silver fringe of rain, which dripped monotonously from the stone sill to the flattened grass below. In the gathering grayness the vines clinging to the old walls tapped with ghostly fingers on the drenched glass. It was an eerie sound. With a shiver of distaste, I drew the velvet draperies close and shut out the dusk.

Sidney Murchison, deep in a leather chair before the fire, lowered his paper, letting his eyeglasses fall on their narrow ribbon, and shot a quizzical gleam at me from under raised brows.

"What's poppycock?" he asked.

"Why, all this furor about spiritualism. It's a result of the war, I suppose. Natural enough — thousands swept into the hereafter, thousands hungry for some word of consolation left behind—but it seems so pitiful, so futile, all their groping. The dead are dead, and that's the end of it, as far as we're concerned—or they, either, I fancy."

Murchison turned his cigar reflectively.

"I wonder!" he mused. "I wonder! You, for instance, or myself — there are things we care about here, things that are intensely vital to us. Somehow I doubt if the mere final closing of our eyes will dissolve that interest. I imagine there will be the urge, with our broader vision, to come back and set things right, to tie up loose ends. I believe our individualities remain intact. In time, of course, we shall grow beyond the preoccupations that engage us here, just as in life we outgrow a phase; but save through voluntary indifference we shall never grow beyond the power to widen and deepen the lives of those we have loved and left."

We were alone in the club library, in that vacant time that precedes the dinner hour, shut away from the tearful dusk by the lamp-lit warmth of the drawn red curtains and the friendly brown backs of books. Lean, faultlessly tailored, his close-cropped, grizzled head tipped back, my companion sat with half closed eyes, apparently deep in reverie. He was a lawyer of no mean fame, and, as such, had known no end of vastly interesting experiences. Evidently he was browsing in his rich storehouse of memories.

A log sent out a little hissing spurt of flame, and Murchison came back with a start.

"Why, man, I've seen it happen! I have seen the dead reach out to right a wrong—reach out with shadow hands across the years."

My interest keened.

"Tell me," I suggested.

"I believe I will, Andrews. Those who might be harmed in the telling are dust."

He leaned back and crossed his long legs before him.

"When I was a lad at Columbia," he began, "I roomed, in my senior year, with a chap named Stanley Warburton. An odd, lonely boy he was, shy, and somehow, without being in the least gloomy, giving an impression of tragedy. I never could quite make him out until, yielding at last to his persuasions, I went home with him after commencement for a visit, and met his father, Peter Warburton, for the first time. Then I understood, for the vague air of sadness that enveloped Stanley was intensified a hundredfold in his father. He was a gray and silent man of perhaps fifty-five, though his melancholy bearing made him seem older. Tall, a trifle stooped, with hawklike nose and pale gray eyes set deep in bony caverns, he had an air of detachment. Even then I had the feeling that here was a man companioned by grief and indifferent to all living things.

"His very dress was of the past—a high, black stock above a finely ruffled shirt, his blue-white hair lying a little long about his ears. He greeted us with a stilted formality that seemed odd from a father to his son. His punctilious, courteous phrases, falling from lips that slashed through his pallor like a scar, chilled me, in spite of Stanley's apparent obliviousness to his coldness. I felt that I wanted to get away from the depression of his presence, and I knew a deep sympathy for the boy whose life had been laid in this stern man's hands. My roommate had been reared in the shadow of sorrow—small wonder, then, that even in the boisterous contact with his kind he was lonely and unconsciously a bit aloof.

"I think I never shall forget that visit. The house itself was a gem. Pure Colonial in architecture, it gleamed against dark trees and flung its white arms wide to the tangled old garden that straggled down to the sea. There was an air of the plenty and affluence of a bygone generation about it, with its lovely old mahogany, its quaintly patterned wallpapers, and its heavy candlesticks scintillant with prisms. It had rare beauty and dignity, but somehow—it was dead. Do you remember the tale of the enchanted castle whose inmates were sunk in an endless sleep by some witch's spell? Well, it was like that. There was an overwhelming sense of somberness about the place, as if nothing lived there but sorrow, nothing walked through its wide halls but memories. The trees that arched above it, filtering the light through living green, added to its gloom. It was like being under water in that strange, glaucous dimness, like dwelling in the heart of some drowned ship."

Murchison's eyes seemed fixed on something very far away, and the expression in their depths stirred a cold feeling in my mind.

"Then there were the sounds of the place, too," he went on. "There was always the whispering sibilance of the sea, with a deeper undertone where the waves broke in a cave half a mile up the shore. It throbbed like a heart, that steady undertone, and sometimes, when the wind went wailing over the cliffs, it seemed like a heart about to break, so wild, so irregular was its beating. The sea, the tawny cliffs, the gray gulls wheeling, the forgotten garden, the scents of salt and lavender—how it all comes back to me!

"There was a half moon of white beach at the foot of the slope, where the garden path was lost in a smother of dune grass. Stanley and I marked this spot for our own. There would be great bathing in the curling surf, and warm basking on the shining sand—but we reckoned without Peter Warburton. He hated the sea, and unconditionally forbade Stanley to swim in it. There was a hot argument behind the closed doors of the study, but the upshot of it was that we were tethered to the strip of beach as surely as if we were on leading strings. Stanley had given his word.

"'It's because of my mother that he hates it so,' he told me. 'She was drowned when I was a baby.'

"Then came the day of the storm. The sulphureous sky was like a great tent drawn down over a restless sea, and the wind went mad. All day it lashed the vines like whipcords against the window panes, and slapped the shutters dolefully. Toward sunset I went for a walk along the cliff that rose to the north of the place, where the trees walled the garden with a dark and swaying mass rising tier on tier to the summit, black against the jaundiced sky. At the very edge of the height stood Peter Warburton, his long cape whipped about his lean, stooped form, his white, uncovered hair blown back. His head was thrown high, his arms were uplifted in an attitude of anathema, and as I watched him the wind caught his voice and flung it across the cliff to me. He was cursing the sea.

"Mad? Of course he must have been a little mad, but then it seemed to me a magnificently romantic thing, the more so for the mystery that cloaked it. As I look back, I can see that from the first there must have been some lack of balance in the man, some colossal egotism that warped his vision and made him unable to accept life as it came to him. Other men are bereaved, and still they carry on.

"It was a strange week that I spent in that house. It was strangest of all when, with my grips waiting in the carriage outside, I went with Stanley to his father's study, to bid Peter Warburton good-by. This was the first time I had seen the room, and I felt a lively curiosity about it. Would it tell anything of the peculiar personality that it sheltered through long hours of each day?

"Stanley knocked. There came no responsive sound, except a minute grating, such as a child might make with a pencil too tightly gripped in inexpert fingers. He turned the knob, and it yielded. The door swung back on a long, narrow, high-ceiled chamber, wavering with shadows and dim with age. There were windows that reached to the floor, but, because of the green glow from the trees without, the atmosphere was washed with a livid light, in which Peter Warburton sat at an old satinwood desk, absorbed in a sheet of paper that lay upon it. One thin hand rested on a queer little heart-shaped table, which traveled on tiny wheels over the outspread paper, while a pencil held upright in the thing sketched furious circles. The floor at his side was littered with crumpled sheets covered with the same design. As we entered, he held up his free hand in monition, and bent intent eyes on the vibrating board. Faster and faster it flew, in ever widening circles, and then, all at once, it was still. His hand dropped from it.

"'I cannot—it eludes me,' he sighed, and shook himself awake.

"He turned to me, with his air of formality drawn about him like a cloak.

"'I trust you will pardon me,' he said, and then to Stanley, who had gone white there in the dimness: 'Last night I could have sworn there were words on the paper, but in the light they turned to nothing!'

"You see, the man was evidently unhinged. I followed the unconscious direction of his gaze, and barely stifled a gasp. Above a mantel of carved onyx hung a portrait so vivid, so intensely vital, that I felt an uncanny chill ripple my spine. The picture was like a swift, clear flood of brilliance in a dark and ghostly wood. A girl with hair like a wind-blown flame, and a skin of cream and amber, stood against a background of cobalt sea, as if poised for instant flight. There was about her an evanescent, haunting quality that was profoundly stirring. Spellbound by her beauty, I could think of nothing but an imprisoned flare stilled to a fine white line. There was that in her shadowy gold-brown eyes that caught at your heart like a hand—wistfulness and a hint of tears; yet on her brow, and in the tender curves of her pictured mouth, there was an ineffable peace. Oh, it lived, that portrait, and spoke of many things, though it was not for years that I was to read its message.

"I took my leave of Peter Warburton. Outside the door I turned to Stanley with a question on my lips.

"'My mother,' he said simply. 'That was done the year she died.'

"'But this was a girl,' I protested. 'Why, she looked not a day more than eighteen!'

"'Just eighteen. You see, she was only sixteen when my father married her. He was thirty-five. I've often wondered how she matched her lilt to his somber tones. Perhaps she never did, for she only lived two years. He worshiped her, though. You see how it is with him. It's not surprising, when you look at her.'

"It really wasn't, I thought, for a lovelier face I had never seen—then.

"I started West that night, and with me I carried the memory of that girl looking down from the tarnished gold of her frame like a little white saint in a shrine.

"I never saw Stanley Warburton again. There were the usual frequent letters at first, dropping in time to a comfortable infrequency; then one day came the announcement of his marriage to a girl whom I did not know. I sent a gift, and, except for an occasional feeling of gladness that now he would be lonely no longer, I more or less forgot him. A year later a daughter was born to them, and they named her Natalie, after the lovely girl of the portrait. Some five years later I was shocked to read the names of Stanley and his wife in the fatality list of a horrible railroad wreck.

"I wondered about the child. Would hers be another loveless, lonely life? It seemed tragic. I wrote Peter Warburton a letter of sympathy, and inquired for her. A few months later, when business interests took me East, I called on him. He had settled little Natalie with her governess in his silent old house, and as she stood beside her grandfather's chair, a blithe, vivid child, I wondered if she might not humanize him just a little, if she might not waken some responsive chord. Apparently she did just that, for several times in the years that followed I looked in on them, and each time I found Natalie grown lovelier, while her grandfather seemed to have warmed and mellowed curiously."

II

Murchison tossed the stub of his cigar into the fire, then settled back and arched his long fingers thoughtfully.

" Queer thing that, about an old dog and new tricks! It's true, you know—true as life; yet this, apparently, was the exception that proved the rule, for here was old Peter Warburton, seventy if he was a day, remade by a child's soft hands. All his harshness swept away, he seemed to have taken on a new guise. Even the house had a brighter look. Some of the trees around the living room wing had been cleared away, and now the sun warmed the old mahogany and frolicked colorfully with the pendent prisms of the ancient candlesticks.

" I recall that on one of my infrequent visits I found the house full of young people, Natalie was celebrating her sixteenth birthday—a party given her by her grandfather—a truly magnificent gesture from him! There was a clean-cut young chap who followed her about adoringly. Evidently he was deeply in love with the girl, and her grandfather appeared well satisfied to have it so.

" ' Young Dick Van Ness,' he told me, and beamed on them from across the room. ' Of course, Sidney, she's only a child now, but there is time—aye, there is time! The lad's the very one I would have chosen for her myself. That boy's grandfather was my best friend. A sea captain, was Arnold Van Ness, and a whiter, truer man never drew breath. The sea took him. By God, the sea has had its way with me and those I loved!'

" Old Peter blew a mighty blast on his silk handkerchief, and wiped his pale eyes, unashamed. I left him, wondering just how deep that softening process had reached, and remembering how I had seen him tense in the green gloom, with eyes strained desperately to the swift circling of a little heart-shaped board.

" In the two years that passed before I turned my face again to the East, little Natalie had blossomed incredibly. She was the portrait come to life. Wistful, with great haunting eyes, all cream and amber under the flame of her hair, she was as lovely as a dream. No wonder old Peter's eyes warmed as he heard her singing about the house, or watched her with her bright head bent above a heap of lacy mystery, while the quaint jewel on her left hand winked knowingly. There were great preparations afoot. Young Dick, with his joyous laugh, was ecstatically at the girl's side a good part of the time. I think I have never seen two who so completely belonged. The gleam of her spirit and his steadiness of purpose, the shadow that lay in her eyes and the sunshine that brightened his smile, her wealth of tenderness and the clean young vigor of his passion—once in a lifetime you find a balance as perfect. The wedding was to be in a week, and Peter Warburton insisted upon my remaining. Natalie, too, seemed genuinely to want me, so I stayed."

Sidney Murchison paused to clip the end from one of his ubiquitous Havanas. As I held the match for him to light it, I noted that his hand shook just a little.

" Yes, I stayed," he continued. " I like to believe that my presence there was a help to Natalie in the black time that followed. It was two days before the wedding that old Peter, leaning heavily on his cane by the door at the foot of the attic stairs, turned the key in its time-stiffened lock, and, with Natalie at his elbow, hobbled up the steep steps in search of the veil he had promised she should wear—her grandmother's wedding veil.

" It was a queer, overcast sort of a day. A portentous shadow wavered about the old house, and the wind moaned faintly somewhere out over the cliffs. Even old Peter's dog, a huge great Dane, was restless, though usually he was a placid brute, lying long hours beside his master's chair, motionless save for the shifting of his little red-rimmed eyes. I remember that the sky looked like beaten brass, and the sea, turbulent under its livid bowl, sent back weird, opalescent gleams.

" I could hear the tapping of the old man's cane on the stairs as those two went on their tender quest, and I could picture the eager face of the girl upturned like a flower to her grandfather's deep-furrowed visage. I knew that the attic was a sacred place to Peter Warburton. Stanley had told me of an occasion in his boyhood when he had ventured to explore it. Along with the recollection of the faded silken finery and quaint carved chests he had found there, he had carried the stinging reminder of the only physical punishment his father ever had administered to him. I knew, too, that old Peter had never crossed its threshold since he had caused his dead wife's belongings to be placed there, and that nothing short of his love for Natalie could have drawn him to that dim shrine.

" The room which had been assigned to me was on the second floor, directly opposite the door that led to the attic, so that I could hear the voices of those two above me—the deep tones of the old man, with Natalie's lilting cadence lifted in little questioning notes through his level resonance. An hour later Natalie came down the narrow stairs with a flat, silk-covered box across her outstretched arms. She saw me there at my desk, and came to my side. Her eyes were like drenched pansies, and her mouth was tremulously tender.

"'Look at this, Uncle Sidney! Isn't it exquisite?'

"She lifted the quaint glass cover, circled with an almost obliterated wreath of painted orange blooms, and held up a corner of the veil, filmy as a spider's web. A ghost of fragrance breathed from its tenuous folds—a subtle hint of sandalwood, and, faint as a remembered dream, the clean, simple scent of lavender.

"'Isn't it lovely?' she said.

"Her face was rapt, and her voice held a little tremor, as of tears.

"'It is indeed as lovely as the bride it will adorn; but, dear girl, brides mustn't weep. Leave all that till later,' I told her.

"She sank on the hassock before my fireplace, and cupped her little square chin in the hollow of her hand. The firelight glinted in those gold-brown eyes of hers as she spoke.

"'I know, but I—I feel so sad! I didn't know about my grandmother before. I've always believed that she just died, as people do, you know—even very young people. Why, she was just my age when it happened! Oh, it must have been terrible! You see there had been a dreadful storm all day, and she was afraid of storms. Grandfather tried to laugh her fears away, but she just sat with her baby across her knees and stared out into the lashing trees, and would not move or speak. When night came, and the wind grew wilder, grandfather gave her a powder to quiet her; and after a time she fell into a troubled sleep, sobbing a little as she slept. All through the night the noise of the wind and the sea pounded about the house, and once or twice my grandmother called out sharply; but when grandfather laid his hand on hers, she was sleeping, so at last he dozed. And then she must have walked in her sleep, as she sometimes did, right out into the storm and down the slope to the sea, or perhaps she was swept from the cliffs by the wind. They never knew just how it happened, but it was three days before they found her washed into that cave where the sea pounds so, and all that time the little lonely baby that was to be my father cried and cried, and grandfather nearly went mad. Oh, I felt as if I could see her, all white and limp and—and trailing her shroud of kelp, when he told me about it up there in the attic. And then there is a very strange thing—you know Dick's grandfather was a sea captain, and his ship went down the very night my grandmother was drowned. Of course, it was in the China Sea, and it was days before the news reached his home; but it was terribly sad for grandfather to lose the two he cared the most about, wasn't it? I wonder—'

"Her voice sank to sudden silence as we heard the sound of old Peter's cane on the stair. She flew to aid him, but he waved her back, and she turned a startled face as the old man gained the hall and stood for a moment, gasping, against the wall. The great Dane rose from his post by the lower staircase and lumbered to his master's side, but Peter Warburton lifted his stick and brought it down savagely on the big dog's back. Natalie cried out in amazement. The dog gave a weird little shuddering moan and shrank away, turning his red-rimmed eyes to watch the old man's progress down the next flight of stairs to his study. We heard the sharp slam of the study door, and the grating of the unaccustomed bolt.

"Then Natalie lifted her white, frightened face to me. She was trembling like a wind-rippled reed, and I put my arm about her to steady her. I could well understand her agitation, for in that brief glimpse I had had of her grandfather's face, I felt that I had gazed on a naked horror. There was something terrible beyond all words in that livid mask of fury, wherein pale eyes blazed white-hot hatred. His mouth, which slashed through his pallor like a scar, was twisted hideously. There was something terrible, too, in the aged and clawlike hand that clutched what appeared to be a packet of papers against the heavy brocade of his dressing gown—clutched it with a grasp that shook until the paper whispered faintly."

III

The wind dashed the rain in great, furious gusts on the red-curtained windows, and far back in the deep throat of the fireplace a voice moaned constantly. I leaned forward to the brass-bound wood box that stands on the library hearth, and laid another log on the embers. I felt cold. Sidney Murchison passed a lean hand across his eyes, with the gesture of one who dispels a black vision.

"Andrews," he mused, "did you ever stop to think of the infinite havoc that attends the shattering of an ideal, the rending of a faith? There was this man, for many years cut off from all the world by his habit of sorrow, his heart hedged round by tragic memories, his only loves on earth the little Natalie and the boy she was to marry—and then a few strokes of an old quill pen sent his world of illusions tumbling down around his stern old head. A few strokes of an old quill pen—and all the time, if he had only known, the antidote for the poison of those words lay, like the tracery of some faint-hearted spider, on countless yellowed pages beneath the web of Natalie's wedding veil.

"But he did not know—and so the day dragged into evening, and still the old man stayed behind the locked door of his study. We could hear the tap of his stick at intervals, and we knew that he must be pacing restlessly; but when Natalie leaned her shining head against the door, and called to him, he would not answer. Even Martin, who had grown gray in his service, could not gain access to that room. Night passed on leaden feet, and the pale morning sunshine was no more wan than Natalie when at last Peter Warburton threw back his study door and called her to him. In a short time she came to my room, with eyes ablaze through a mist of tears.

"'He wants you, Uncle Sidney. He has gone mad, I think. He wants to break my life into little pieces, but I won't let him—do you hear? I won't let him!'

"Her voice broke, and she flung out a shaking hand.

"'Look!' she cried. There was an angry mark across its slender whiteness, and the betrothal ring was gone. 'He took it off when I refused to give it to him. He held me tight and tore it away from me!'

"I left her with a word of reassurance, and hurried to the study, where the old man sat gripping his cane with hands that showed white at the knuckles. He sat very straight and high in his fireside chair, but his blue old lips mumbled and wreathed continuously. The dog had evidently entered the room with Natalie, for now it crouched by his side, with sagging, slavering jowls, and watchful little red eyes under the relaxed folds of its forehead. The thin sunlight filtered down through the trees that still pressed close about the study wing, and wavered across the cold room to touch with watery brightness the portrait, where it hung above the dead, gray ashes of the hearth. I started in horror as my eyes fell on its former loveliness, for now the canvas hung in jagged ribbons.

"Peter Warburton turned a ravaged face to me.

"'My boy, I need your professional services,' he said, and his voice was as flat as a flail.

"It was as if something had gone out of the man, as if a beloved and shining thing had crumpled to hideousness at his feet. He motioned me to a chair.

"'It is a matter of a will,' he told me, and fixed his cold, pale eyes on mine so that the words I would have uttered froze on my lips, and I nodded silently. 'Get paper from my desk and write,' he commanded shortly. 'I, Peter Warburton, being of sound mind, do hereby give and bequeath all of which I die possessed to the girl known as Natalie Warburton, upon the condition that she never marries—'

"'But, Mr. Warburton, her engagement! Why, to-morrow will be her wedding day!'

"'You are in error. There will be no wedding day for her!'

"'But young Van Ness—' I broke in, aghast.

"'That name may not be mentioned here!'

"His words rasped through the quiet room. The big dog stirred uneasily at the sound. I sat with pen poised above the sheet of foolscap, while conjectures ran through my mind like squirrels in a wheel. I seemed to hear again Natalie's broken words, to see the bruised white hand she held before me, and I knew that never, while her spirit burned high and clear as a flame, would this old man's word come between her and the fulfillment of her destiny.

"'Aye, but there is a way to enforce righteousness.' It was as if he had read my thoughts. 'Her strain must be stamped out!'

"'Mr. Warburton, you are mad,' I began, but he cut in coldly.

"'Not mad, my boy—not that, but sane

at last! After almost half a century of delirium, sane at last! Read this!'

"From the pocket of his dressing gown he took a letter. It was faded and torn, yet as my eyes traversed its surface I drew back before the fire of those written words, and from the import of the signature sprawling boldly across the foot of the page —'Thine through all eternity, Arnold.'

"The old man sat with bowed head and brooding eyes.

"'And that was my friend,' he said at last. 'My friend—and the woman I worshiped as one would worship a saint! When she went, the world went black to me; but I can see it all now. It was a judgment—the hand of God laid on them both in wrath; and now into my hand is delivered the power to see that her seed shall perish from the earth! Write. If the girl known as Natalie Warburton should see fit to disobey my command, the bodies of her father and of the woman who bore him shall be exhumed from the Warburton burial vault, and their names publicly stricken from the family records.'

"'Not your son!' I cried. 'Surely not—'

"'*My* son?' His blue lips lifted hideously. 'Now read to me what you have written.'

"I went sick with a sudden lust to tear the thing across and crush it down the old man's throat. I give you my word that I've never been so close to murder. My fingers ached to close on that corded neck. I raised my head and found those pale eyes, keen and cold as sword blades, fixed on mine. No grip of iron bands could have held me tighter. I picked up the paper.

"Then, as I read that blasphemous will, I swear something came into that room. The heavy damask curtains did not stir, and there was no sound, except for the hollow pulse of the sea; but all at once the very air was tense and pregnant with portent. The great Dane, crouched by his master's chair, raised his huge head and rumbled low in his throat. Old Peter struck out blindly with his cane, and the dog dropped his muzzle on paws that twitched, while the hackles rose uneasily on his spine.

"'Won't you reconsider?' I pleaded. 'This document is only so much paper now —let me burn it. Signed and sealed, it becomes an instrument of harm to those you love.'

"'Those I love be damned!' he snarled. 'I'll be obeyed! Do you think I'll let that woman's blood pass into another generation, any more than I would let her face desecrate my house?'

"He pointed a bony finger at the portrait, where it hung in tatters against the wall, and seemed to sway slightly, though no breeze stirred in the room.

"'Now ring for Martin,' he ordered. 'The man's a fool, but he'll do to witness a paper, eh?'

"I paused with my hand on the velvet bell pull.

"'I do this reluctantly, Mr. Warburton. It is an act of tyrannical injustice.'

"'Injustice?' He threw back his head and cackled in satirical mirth. 'A lawyer to prate of justice? Now look you—the thing that I decree is justice for me and mine! Ring!'

"Until that moment I had hoped that he would not go through with this cruel vengeance, that he would at least relent and save the happiness of the two young people whom this will would crush. With one swift glance I measured him—the frowning brows drawn down over leaden eyes, the thin sneer of his mouth, the hands that opened and shut with a little dry, rustling sound around the gold head of his cane. No quarter there! I pulled the wine-colored cord, and Martin came, soft-footed, into the room.

"'You rang, sir?'

"'Take these keys and fetch me my portfolio. Then be ready to witness this document.'

"The servant unlocked a lacquered chest that stood against the wall, and took out a worn leather case. He placed it across his master's knees. I spread the will upon it, and offered him my pen.

"'I'll not use that damned contraption! Martin, bring me the ink and my own steel pen.'

"Martin crossed to the old satinwood desk. As he lifted the great bronze inkwell, it slipped from his hand and spread a swift black stain across the floor. Peter Warburton struggled to his feet with an imprecation, and the veins sprang out in fury on his temples. The servant's eyes showed white rims of terror—a fear that seemed to me out of all proportion to the offense. His voice broke queerly through his trembling lips.

"'I vow, sir, I could not help it! It—

it felt like some one *pushed* it from my hand, sir!'

"'A likely tale! Bah! Don't stand there like a fish! I'll take your pen, Sidney—or no! Wait!' His eyes narrowed to pale slits, and he caressed his lean jaw in a dry, hard hand. 'Martin,' he said at last, 'go you to the attic, and in the rosewood desk against the south wall you will find an old quill pen. There is ink there, too, though it may have dried up. However, fetch it, and we shall see.' He shook horribly with noiseless laughter. 'Poetic justice, eh, my boy? All the pretty words that pen has written, and they are gone—down to the sea in a ship, perhaps; but gone, at any rate. And now that same pen will lay my name across this page and change two human destinies! Do you think she can see what her wantonness has brought? I used to believe—'

"His voice broke off abruptly, and he turned a mask of composure to Martin as the servant entered with a long, speckled quill and a little brown wooden inkpot.

"The room seemed suddenly very stale and dank, and faintly murmurous with an unseen presence. I shivered as Martin gave the pen into the old man's hand, and uncorked the inkpot. The huge dog lumbered to his feet and stood stiff-legged, with those wicked little red eyes of his fixed on empty air. I tell you I felt my hair prickle at its roots. Then he pointed his gray muzzle straight up and howled. The sound rose and swelled in clamorous dissonance, then died away till all the atmosphere was vibrant as with the muffled clangor of a slowly tolling bell, while the dog lay down again and laid his huge, wrinkled head on old Peter's feet.

"The old man's fingers closed convulsively on the will, which lay spread out before him. It crackled crisply in his grasp, and, all unbidden, the memory of another day came to me. Once more I saw this man waiting, hungry-hearted, tense, above a swiftly circling board for words that in the daylight turned to nothing.

"The paper crackled like brown leaves burning, and Peter Warburton dipped his quill into the ink.

"'My purpose shall be carried out,' he muttered.

"For a moment, as he held the pen poised in his thin hand, blue-veined, infinitely aged, there was no sound save the measured ticking of the tall clock. An odd mist crept in from somewhere, like a pale, sea-scented wraith, veiling the watery sunlight, bringing on frail wings a peculiar, stifling vapor that seemed to press close about us, like a damp and clinging garment. Old Peter lowered his hand to the paper, and I caught my breath with a poignant feeling of defeat. Then, suddenly, he straightened with a little, choking cry. His fingers tightened on the quill until it bent in his hand, and twitched in a brief spasm across the page. Then the white head went limp on his plum-colored breast, the quill sagged from his hand with a tiny scratching sound, and the big gray dog got slowly to his feet and went out through the open door."

There fell a silence as tangible as a hand laid upon us. For its brief space even the wind seemed to hold its breath. Murchison leaned forward, his elbows on his knees and his long hands loosely clasped before him, and stared into the flames.

"Well, picture to yourself that moment," he went on. "There were the old servant and I alone in the room with all that was left of Peter Warburton. Martin was tearing at the neckcloth beneath the brocade robe, and chafing in futile hope the fast whitening hand that hung limply down. I gave him my aid, but all the time I was conscious of but one thought—Natalie.

"The will lay spread out upon the dead man's knees, with the quill across the paper, just as his falling hand had dropped it. Even as we laid the portfolio on the table, and lifted old Peter to the sofa, I could see a blur of lilac beneath the black of my own writing. So then he had, in that last desperate struggle, signed the name that would give it the power to wreck two lives! There could be no doubt as to Natalie's obedience. It was the fair name of the dead against the happiness of the living, and I knew the answer to that.

"I knew, too, even then, that the accusation was false. I knew it as well as if I had already seen the diary that we later found under the wedding veil. It was a little limp leather book, through whose yellowed pages ran the tear-stained tale of the first Natalie's love for Arnold Van Ness—a love that was denied, that it might not bring sorrow to another. I was shaken by the warring forces within me. My heart did battle with my conscience, my years of professional training, my sense of all that was ethical and honorable in a man of the law—and even before I sent Martin out of the room to summon Natalie, my heart had triumphed.

"As the door swung shut behind him, I sprang to the table and closed my fingers on the will with a thrill of purpose. I swept it with a quick glance, and felt my skin creep on my body, while my mouth went dry as pith. Circles—nothing more! Circles sweeping entwined across the page, futile, meaningless!

"Well, the need was gone, but I tore the thing in two at the sound of Natalie's running footsteps on the stair. As I held a match to it, and watched it curl and shrivel to a pallid ash, I wondered if old Peter knew, in that last moment, that *her* hand had lain close on his."

Belated Rewards

HOW PHILIP ADAMS DEMONSTRATED THAT HIS LIFE HAD NOT BEEN A TOTAL FAILURE

By Charles Belmont Davis

PHILIP ADAMS was endowed with nearly all of those gifts which other young men envy, and which are beloved by all women, young or old. His parents were responsible for his good looks, for a distinguished social position, and for an education that was as sound as it was varied. His good manners, his kindly heart, and the charm that gave him a real and most interesting personality, were largely of his own making.

In sporting parlance, had it not been for one drawback, Philip would have started the race of life as an odds-on favorite. The drawback was his lack of any considerable amount of inherited or acquired wealth. His financial assets consisted of a ten-thousand-dollar heritage left him by his father and the modest weekly stipend he drew from the fashionable architect in whose office he was employed.

Most young men whose friends were as universally rich as were those of young Adams would probably have made serious inroads on their patrimony, but not so with Philip. In spite of the temptations with which his good looks and his popularity surrounded him, he managed, without any difficulty whatever, to maintain a single-track mind and an extremely modest standard of living. Every Monday morning he returned from some gorgeous home in the country where he had spent the week-end, and, unruffled and content, settled down to his very simple bedroom and bath.

It was not that Philip did not care for the luxuries of life, or was at all lacking in sporting spirit—even in the gambling spirit. Wall Street tempted him greatly. Since leaving college, he had refused several flattering offers of positions in the offices of his numerous broker friends.

The trouble with Philip, and what prevented him from following his natural business inclinations, was the fact that he was honestly and sincerely in love. In shaping his career, he believed that he should establish himself in a sure and sound profession, rather than tempt the precarious fortunes of those who for a livelihood follow the little figures on the tape of the stock ticker. Steadfastly he kept to the safe and sane paths which common sense told him led to the goal of his great ambition.

The name of the object of Philip's love was Muriel Leigh. The world in which they both lived would have considered her an excellent wife for the young architect. She had all the attributes necessary to match those of Philip, and, in addition, her mother was possessed of an ample fortune.

For a year Philip's courtship ran smoothly. Nothing definite had been arranged, nor had an engagement even been suggested, because Philip did not feel that his financial position justified a proposal. However, he was progressing, if but slowly. He had his ten thousand dollars in the best of gilt-edged securities, and, according to the well established signals known to lovers, he was daily gaining a surer hold on the affections of Muriel. He talked with her at dinners, danced with her at dances, and frequently met her at week-end parties, when they played golf and tennis and took long walks together. To their friends the eventual engagement of the young couple seemed inevitable.

How Mrs. Leigh regarded the young architect's attentions to her daughter, Philip did not know. Mrs. Leigh ran so true to type, was in all ways so much like the comic supplement idea of a rich New York society matron, that she appealed to Philip as a stage character rather than a real person. What was going on in her brain—that is, if she had a brain—Philip could not possibly imagine; but outwardly she treated him with the same disinterested civility that she showed toward all the other young men with whom she came in formal contact.

It was something more than a year after Philip had begun his courtship when he realized that Mrs. Leigh had definite views as to her daughter's future, and that he played no part in these plans whatever.

The basis of Mrs. Leigh's schemes—in fact, her whole scheme—was the marriage of Muriel to Robert Gerard, a retired banker. Gerard was not an old man. He had retired because he had accumulated more money than he could possibly spend, and because he preferred to devote his energies to such charities and altruistic deeds as would give him the broadest publicity and the greatest number of foreign decorations. The thought of a bright ribbon in his buttonhole made his slight frame quiver with excitement, and gave his narrow, colorless face an expression that was almost human. Apparently, while in a generous mood, his eyes had fallen on the beautiful Muriel, and he had decided to allow her to share the glory that was to accrue from the honors his great wealth was going to buy.

When the rumor first reached Philip that Gerard was a suitor for Muriel's hand and heart, he laughed at the audacity of the man. Philip had known Gerard slightly for some time, and, with the inevitable intolerance of youth, had regarded him with an amused contempt. However, when the rumors had become sufficiently numerous, Philip's smiles gave way to moments of irritation and annoyance, and he decided that for his own peace of mind he would prove them incorrect and wholly groundless.

On his next visit to Muriel, perfectly sure of the girl's love for himself, he jestingly referred to the malicious gossips who had linked her name with that of Robert Gerard. The scene that followed was indelibly etched on Philip's mind, and for long afterward he recalled it as if it had happened the day before.

They were seated across the tea table in Muriel's cozy little living room, where she received only her intimate friends. The glow from the last rays of the setting sun gently touched the silver tea things and Muriel's demure and lovely face. At the mention of Gerard's name, Philip was surprised to see that the girl's cheeks reddened perceptibly, her eyes became a little misty, and she slowly lowered them before his incredulous gaze.

"Why, Muriel!" Philip gasped. "You don't mean—"

With a rather sorry effort at bravado, Muriel raised her eyes and looked fairly into those of Philip. When she spoke, her voice was very low and very unsteady.

"Yes, Philip," she said. "I am engaged to Mr. Gerard."

II

It is difficult to predict just how any man will act when the ambition of his life is suddenly snatched from his grasp. In this particular case the man smiled broadly and shook his head.

"But, Muriel," he said, "you can't marry Gerard. You love me and I love you. Anyhow, he's not a man—he's just a poor shrimp. Of course, he has plenty of money, but so have you. There would be no excuse for you at all."

"Mr. Gerard is a very fine man and a very good man," Muriel protested. "My mother is very fond of him."

"Oh, no, she's not!" Philip laughed. "Your mother isn't fond of any one, except perhaps herself. She isn't even fond of you, if she wants to marry you to that monkey!"

In a most dignified and somewhat frightened manner Muriel arose and faced her rejected suitor.

"Good-by, Philip," she said. "You really must go now. I've got to dress for dinner."

Philip pulled himself out of the deep chair in which he had been sitting, and bowed low over the hand, cool and unresponsive, that Muriel held toward him. Then he spoke to the girl calmly, and without any perceptible trace of inward anger.

"Muriel," he said, "simply as a matter of expediency, I think you are making a mistake in marrying for money—for money is the only thing that Gerard has got that I haven't. I don't believe you are the kind of girl who is going to be happy just because her husband can supply her with the fleshpots. You're much too fine for that!"

Muriel did not take his words at all as Philip had expected her to take them. Apparently she was neither surprised nor hurt. Indeed, it seemed to be a new Muriel, a Muriel whom he had never met before, who was talking to him.

"I suppose it's my training, Philip," she said; "but if I married you, I'm quite sure mamma would cut me off, and—and—well, I doubt very much if I could be happy, even with you, without the fleshpots. You see, I've lived in the most criminal state of luxury all my life; and, to be quite frank, I don't believe you could support me in a criminal state of luxury. Now could you?"

"Sure I couldn't!" Philip said, and smiled grimly. "I might some of these days—by the time you were a nice old lady. As a matter of fact, it's probably very doubtful if I ever could. I certainly can't recall any of my ancestors who died rich; but most of them were men who had done something worth while, and who got their reward after they were through. Most of the Adams men have had large funerals, and that's a pretty good tribute to what a man has accomplished, rather than to how many securities he has left to his relatives. No doubt Robert Gerard will have a fairly showy funeral at St. Thomas's—if St. Thomas's is still the fashionable church at the time of his demise—but the brains of the mourners won't average very high, and the chances are that they'll have done as little for humanity as Gerard himself."

Muriel smiled, as if not quite convinced by Philip's reasoning.

"One's funeral seems a long time to wait for one's reward," she said. "I'm afraid I should prefer my reward when I could get the fun out of it, rather than my mourning but proud family. However, I suppose that that, again, is my faulty training. You see, I can't quite appreciate the feelings of an Adams, because the men of my family never did very much except make money, and probably they were too busy doing that to worry about who would come to their funerals. Now, Philip, you must run along—I've really got to dress!"

Smilingly Philip rose to take his leave.

"Anything I might say would sound like heroics," he said; "and as I hate heroics, I won't say anything. Good night, Muriel, and good luck to you!"

"Good luck to you, Philip," the girl smiled back at him, "and a grand funeral; but I hope you'll have all kinds of success and happiness in the meantime!"

III

When Philip had reached his room, he lit a pipe, sank into a low chair, and rested his feet on the fender of his fireless hearth. After an hour he got up and slowly began to dress for dinner.

During that hour of reflection he had definitely decided to change his career—that is, all of it that Muriel Leigh had not already changed. On the following morning he would resign from the firm of architects who employed him, accept the most advantageous offer he could get from a brokerage house, and in all ways follow his own gay inclinations. He had tried to be a hard-working, stodgy, reputable member of society, and it had brought him nothing that he had really cared for. Henceforth, the more reckless the enterprise, the more eagerly he would seek it and all its accompanying thrills.

Of several tentative offers that had been made him by his Wall Street friends, there was one that stood clearly out from the others. Regarded from his changed point of view, it seemed to be the only logical one. The two members of the firm of Benson & Peabody were young and aggressive, eminently successful in business, and warm friends of Philip. It was with them, therefore, that he decided to cast his fortunes.

A few days after his interview with Muriel, her engagement to Gerard was officially announced. If the defeated suitor was in need of the sympathy of his many friends, he did not show it. Some said that, being an Adams, he was too fine a person to wear his heart on his sleeve.

"Phil is a good loser," others observed, and let it go at that.

Apparently he was greatly interested in his new business, and successful in it. He moved to an expensive apartment, where he gave entertainments that were always in good taste and frequently lavish. As a matter of fact, no sooner had he tied himself up with his brokerage firm than he began to speculate with his patrimony; and, as often happens to beginners, his ventures proved profitable.

When he met Muriel, as he often did at dinners and dances and week-end parties in the country, his manner was friendly; but she was conscious that he avoided being left alone with her. Also, having known Philip so well and for so long, she noted that where he had once drunk two glasses of champagne, he now drank three. Indeed, to her knowing eyes, her former lover was showing, in many ways, a certain recklessness which was quite unlike his old self.

Had she not been always conscious that their last serious talk had thrown up a barrier between them, she would have warned Philip against the changes that had overtaken him. Many times she regretted much that she had said at what had proved to be their virtual farewell. Had she been more sympathetic, and responded less flippantly to his remark about big funerals, she believed that she might have held his friendship, and might have been of some help to him when he needed help.

It was not long before others saw the change in Philip. When his speculations turned from gains to losses, he became so reckless in his manner and in his mode of life that it was evident to all—especially to the members of his firm, who had both a business and a friendly interest in his personal account. It was, indeed, quite evident that unless he stopped gambling, he was headed for the financial rocks.

Kindly warnings influenced him not at all. All signs seemed to indicate that Philip was riding for a fall; and of course, in due time, the fall came. When the final accounting was made, his firm lost nothing, except Philip's services—which, as a matter of fact, had not proved to be of any particular value.

His business career at an end, Philip did not remain long among the scenes where he had once played so pleasant and conspicuous a part. He left no debts, no obligations, not even a good-by. Square with the world in which he had lived, and of which he had been an ornament, he vanished from it completely.

There were many friends who would have given him a position, or would have helped him in a financial way; but it seemed as if Philip wished either to begin life anew, or to go to the devil completely. Whichever the alternative, the scene was evidently to be far away from his old haunts and old associates.

It is not entirely true that he left no farewells, for he sent a bunch of flowers and a card to Muriel Leigh. The inscription on the card was:

> Good-by, Muriel, and good luck.—PHILIP.

For some reason Muriel never mentioned the incident to any one, not even to her *fiancé;* and yet Philip Adams, good-looking, amusing, assertive Phil, was the most clear-cut and the most often recurring memory in Muriel's life. Dancing, or dining, or playing golf, or just dawdling in her home, there always seemed to be something to remind her of his cheerful laugh and his pleasant, chivalric ways.

Any ornament, however brilliant, if taken from a cabinet, is not long missed, and Philip quickly faded from the memory of his friends; but Muriel remembered. She often wondered what he was doing at just that particular moment. Once she heard a doctor describing the electrocution of some poor devil of a murderer at Sing Sing. When the physician told how the switch was turned on that shot the electricity through the man's body, and sent him to eternity, Muriel closed her eyes and dug her finger nails into the soft palms of her pink and white hands.

"That's just what I did to Phil!" she whispered to herself. "Poor, dear old Phil—I killed him!"

IV

THE first news that reached New York, or the part of New York that had known Philip Adams, came about a year after his sudden and silent departure. A man who had been a friend of his earlier years met him on a passenger boat which plied between several of the larger ports of the West Indies, and on which Philip was acting as purser. He looked much older, and as if broken in health. When greeted by his former friend, his only desire, apparently, was to be left alone. The story was told in various clubs and at many dinner parties, created a mild interest, and was quickly forgotten.

When Muriel, now Mrs. Robert Gerard,

met the man who had seen Philip, she tried, with an apparently indifferent manner, to learn more details of the present life of the man whom she had rejected; but she was not particularly successful. All the returned traveler could tell her was that Philip appeared old, tired, and ill — whether from hard work, or worries, or drink, he did not know, and certainly Philip himself had made no effort to inform him.

The next word of Philip that reached Muriel was also the last. She heard it at a dinner—a very formal dinner, at which she took no interest in any of the guests, not even in her husband. The man who told the story was now the managing editor of a great newspaper. He had once been a star reporter, and hence not only knew the value of a good news story, but also knew how to tell it.

He was sitting directly across the table from Muriel, who was carrying on a casual, commonplace conversation with the man on her right. Suddenly there was something in the tone of the editor's voice that seemed to announce:

" Now I'm going to tell you a story that's worth while. Every one had better listen."

So Muriel turned from her dull neighbor on her right, and listened.

The editor's slightly raised voice, or the something in his tone that had arrested Muriel's attention, seemed to have had a similar effect on the other guests at the long table. Finding all eyes focused upon him, the speaker, always alert to take full advantage of his opportunity, began his tale with much deliberation.

" The story reached the office," he began, " just before I left to go uptown—too late, I'm happy to say, for the evening edition. I suppose it appealed to me particularly because it's one of those stories that would have only a local interest if they weren't handled by a man who knows news values. By sheer good luck we had a really fine reporter at Rio — a man named Bowen, who was down there to write some special articles. When he heard of this wreck, he interviewed the passengers, saw that the story had news interest for New Yorkers, and cabled it on. It's really a great human interest story, and I hate to spoil it. You can read it to-morrow morning on the front page, and it's worth reading, believe me; but if Bowen hadn't happened to be at Rio, it wouldn't have been worth more than half a dozen lines. Perhaps that's what interests me most, because, unlike most of yourselves, I didn't know the man it's all about."

The speaker stopped. As no one else spoke, he began the story with dramatic effect.

" The steamer was called the Santa Maria, and carried passengers and freight between Rio and a number of small South and Central American ports. She was a rotten old tub, and had been condemned, but you know what graft is in Rio; and the owners decided to take a chance and send her on one more voyage. Before she was a day out, she ran into one of those tropical storms that come from nowhere, leave death and destruction in their wake, and then hurry on to do more mischief. Anyhow, this particular storm left the Santa Maria a total wreck. The pumps wouldn't work, and such discipline as there had been turned into complete panic. The crew, made up of no-good Central Americans, rushed the officers, put them out of commission, and started for the lifeboats and the rafts. The passengers—a mob of poor peasants who were on their way back to their homes—made no resistance, but ran about the decks, screaming for help, and getting nowhere.

" So far, of course, the disaster has no place on the front page of a big daily. The value of a disaster to a newspaper is in the prominence of the people who suffer from it. That is why the sinking of the Titanic and the Lusitania made two of the greatest newspaper stories ever printed. Their passenger lists were made up of men and women big in the political or financial or social world of Europe and America. The passengers of the Santa Maria were a lot of unknown South American farmers and laborers, whose names meant nothing except to their relatives."

The editor stopped for a moment, moistened his throat with a lingering sip of champagne, caught an approving and understanding glance from his hostess, and went on.

" Now comes the news interest of the story. When the panic was at its height, and the crew was about to make its getaway in the boats, leaving the passengers to their own devices, the situation, as it sometimes does, created its own savior. He was a common seaman, but, according to Bowen and the evidence of the passengers, he must have been a natural organizer. With the help of a belaying pin he toppled over the leaders of the insurgent crew, somehow or other pacified the crazy passengers, and, in an extraordinarily short time, brought a kind of order out of what had been complete chaos. The boats and rafts—which, as is usual on such coastwise steamers, were wholly inadequate—were filled and lowered. At last only the captain and the seaman who had saved the day were left on the ship. The captain was still pretty woozy from the rush his crew had given him, so the seaman helped him down a rope ladder that was dangling over one of the already overcrowded boats, and then started to follow him.

" Just as the sailor had a good grip on the ladder, an old woman rushed out on the deck. It turned out afterward that she had been shut in somewhere in the steerage quarters, but had finally broken loose. Of course, when she reached the deck, she was in a complete state of hysteria; but our plucky seaman, still on the job, climbed back over the rail, gathered up the poor terrified soul, and gently but firmly placed her on the ladder, from which she eventually dropped into waiting arms in the lifeboat. Incidentally, the seaman went down with the ship."

" Extraordinary man, and an extraordinary tale!" said Robert Gerard, from far down the table. "All the more extraordinary because one hardly expects such an exhibition of calm bravery from one of those excitable South Americans, under such unusual conditions."

The editor smiled.

" But you see the common seaman wasn't a South American. That's precisely what makes the story a front-page story. He was a North American — a New Yorker, bred and reared in the social purple, who, for some unknown reason, disappeared about two years ago."

Muriel Gerard had slowly turned her eyes away from the editor. Until the story was finished, they remained fixed on a bowl of flowers that stood on the table just before her.

" And you say the man went down with the ship?" the hostess asked. " Why do you suppose he did not take his chance with the others?"

The editor pursed his lips and smiled at his questioner.

" Well, according to Bowen, the boats were dangerously overcrowded. It may have been, too, that having done his bit, life held no further interest for him. But I've butchered the story. You must read Bowen's account to-morrow. It's really a bully bit of descriptive writing—the lone man on the deck, leaning cross-armed over the rail, his figure silhouetted against the storm clouds, looking down at the upturned faces of the crowded boats, the whole mob begging their deliverer to join them; and then the big black hulk, suddenly trembling as if in its death throes, making a deliberate nose dive, bound for the bottom, and leaving nothing but a caldron of seething waters and wreckage."

With an eye to the proper dramatic climax, the editor had carefully concealed the name of his hero; but now his story was at an end, and the moment for the dénouement had arrived.

" I particularly liked the last line of Bowen's story. It follows his description of the disappearance of the ship, as it plunged down amid the cries and the prayers of the men and women in the lifeboats. The line is:

> " And thus, chivalric and unafraid, Philip Adams met his death. Few men have had a finer funeral."

RAIN ON THE MOUNTAIN PEAK

All day relentless rain swept down,
  And wrapped the mountain peak in mist;
But now the sunset's crimson glow
  With evening keeps a transient tryst.

The light streams swiftly from the west
  In regal pomp of gold and red,
And like a heavenly artist weaves
  A nimbus round the mountain's head.

William Hamilton Hayne

The Necessary Spark

A VETERAN OF THE CHAUTAUQUA CIRCUITS HAS A NEW EXPERIENCE

By Oney Fred Sweet

GEORGE RUNKELL had given his lecture on Chautauqua platforms for so many years that it was possible for his thoughts, at times, to wander away from his audience during the narration of an anecdote or the repetition of a phrase. His " Silver Lining " message was no longer an extemporaneous oratorical effort. It had stood the test of time so long that experienced bureau managers had for two decades selected its author and expounder for the initial number of their seven-day programs, confident of its reaction upon the communities they served. And inasmuch as routine had gradually permitted for the " philosopher of sunshine " a double-tracked mind while he spoke in public, he was conscious, in his opening day of the summer season in Meadowville, of certain sounds that emanated from beyond the khaki curtains of the dressing room, below and to the left of him in the big brown tent.

The sounds had been slight—the result, really, of studied efforts at silence. The twang of a stringed instrument being incased, the springing back into place of a piece of pine flooring accidentally stepped upon, the backward and forward swish of a shining cloth against the toe of a shoe—in short, the two Damerons, having finished their prelude, were preparing to leave " the lot."

It was when Dr. Runkell reached his peroration—his insistence that matters were never so bad but what they might be worse, his assurance that there was no road so long but that it had a turning, his contention that a smile should light the features, no matter how trying the situation—that he observed the team of entertainers rounding the edge of the Chautauqua tent.

Owing to the sultriness of the June day, the canvas walls had been lifted by the crewboys, and the movements of the Damerons, as they picked their way over the guy ropes and across newly mowed weeds, furnished a rival attraction which the lecturer, high-powered though he might be, found difficult to combat. Action, pitted against sound, was having decidedly the better of it.

Even as he closed with the statement that on the other side of every gathering of vapor there was glitter instead of gloom, Dr. Runkell, from the tail of an eye, was watching the departure of the couple with whom he knew that he would have to spend much of his time during the sixteen-week season just being launched.

It was the Dameron woman who was most in evidence—she who had played the saxophone solo while Dr. Runkell waited at the back of the tent for the moment of his own appearance. Mrs. Dameron could, without fear of contradiction, be described as heavy-set. She seemed perfectly willing to let her alert, nervous husband lead the procession away from the grounds. She was taking her time. She seemed wholly unmindful of the fact that, inasmuch as she and her husband had seen fit to traverse the space in full view of the audience, those on the plank seats were likely to take advantage of the opportunity to observe what the musicians looked like " off " as well as " on."

The climax of Dr. Runkell's lecture suffered, as a consequence. He could not compete with a street dress that had supplanted a spangled stage costume, with hair that afforded debate as to whether it had or had not been touched up with henna, with a peculiarly shaped instrument case, with—well, with the team that was supposed to depart from the scene for good when it had finished its prelude.

As Dr. Runkell closed, there was applause; but he was accustomed to that. He was among polite people, and he realized that a percentage of the expression of appreciation was purely perfunctory. He wiped the perspiration from about his collar, and removed his alpaca coat.

His concern, now, was about a boarding place. He had arrived in Meadowville barely in time for the afternoon program. He had heard, but had not seen, the musical duo, until they came from the platform with the information that they had completed their number.

" We've warmed 'em up for you," the banjoist had advised him. " Go on now and knock 'em dead!"

Dr. Runkell, in his career as a Chautauqua lecturer, had been associated with all sorts of people who furnished musical preludes, but hitherto the pianists and readers and violinists had been persons possessing at least a measure of refinement. For this season just starting—well, the Damerons had flashed a first impression that was disconcerting. He knew how intimately the members of the same day's program were thrown together, and sixteen weeks was a rather long stretch.

That evening, in the carpeted, curtain-shaded, slant-floored dining room of the Commercial Hotel, Dr. Runkell found himself seated opposite the lady with the henna hair and her partner.

" How's the steak, doc? First time I've seen one of those trick casters on a table for ages!" Mr. Dameron glanced about the room for the waitress. " We ain't got any too much time, if we're going to get in a rehearsal. Wish Eastman had told me we had the whole program at night! We'll have to run over that medley again. You're flat there in one place, Mae. You know, we thought we was going to spend the summer at Sheepshead Bay. ' Chautauqua!' I says to Eastman, when he phoned me to come in. ' Chautauqua! What is it?' I'd heard the word before, but that was about all. Good thing I worked all the way out here on building up a program! It 'll take us a day or two yet to know just what they want. I don't suppose I had five minutes there in Eastman's office, altogether. It was three o'clock then, and the train left at five. What have you got, miss? You can make mine eggs, lookin' at me."

Mae yawned, and voiced her regret that she had not had time to get a shampoo before leaving New York.

Connie Dameron threw up his hands.

" You know how much time we had, pal! There's a lot of things I'd like to have got—extra banjo strings, some more of those soft collars that you can self laundry, and the right kind of liquid for my white shoes. Thing for us to do was to get to Meadowville. Well, there was such a town, and we're here. Let me get this thing, doc. Do we go on to-morrow to a new date? You only do the one turn a day, don't you? Well, that's enough when it's an hour and a half, single. Mae and me are new to this game. All we've ever done has been vaudeville. Ever do vaudeville, doc? Course, you'd have to trim down to not more than fourteen minutes, and make it snappier. We caught your act this afternoon from back of the tent."

" Might I not suggest," Dr. Runkell broached, " that you should refrain from walking around in view of the audience until after I have finished my afternoon discourse? If you could take your departure, say, from the rear of the pavilion—"

" Did it bother you? Say, that's a shame!" Mr. Dameron was filled with self-reproach. " I'm sorry. We won't do it again. You see all this is new to Mae and me. There was a cow staked out across the alley, and Mae thought mebbe it might get loose. Last thing we'd ever do is anything like that, intentional. We never played under canvas before, and it's all different."

II

Dr. Runkell arose with dignity and pushed his chair beneath the table. He went to his room—bed, chair, and a stand with washbowl and pitcher. From his window he got a panoramic view of Meadowville—the tin roofs of half a dozen places of business, a cluster of white houses, vacant lots, a garage built of cement blocks, a low depot, a tall grain elevator, cornfields stretching in every direction. The sun was losing none of its intensity as it neared the horizon.

The sky, in fact, was unusually clear. The country needed rain, and Meadowville was in a mood to welcome shadowed heavens for a spell, whether the other side of the clouds should be silvered or no. Dr. Runkell was weary. For twenty years he had traversed the country, speaking in churches and lodge halls, and on lyceum and Chautauqua platforms. He looked much older than he had when his photograph that was used for window cards had been taken. His hair was black then; now it was snow white.

He fumbled among the letters in his grip for the envelope, recently received from the bureau, which contained the itinerary of his towns for the summer. There were a few more than a hundred towns listed. Some of them could be found on the map. Perhaps he had been in a few of them before. He could not always remember. He had lost his faculty for retaining impressions of places.

Accompanying the itinerary was a letter which had hitherto escaped the lecturer's notice. Following formal greetings and good wishes, Dr. Runkell came to this paragraph:

> At the last moment we have been disappointed by the Philharmonic Trio, which was to have furnished your prelude, and we have been obliged to wire to New York for something of equal merit. The substituted organization should reach Meadowville in time for the opening program. We have arranged for our companies to travel by automobile this season.

By auto! Dr. Runkell gasped. Hitherto he had always journeyed by rail. He understood railroads, and knew their time tables by heart. He had spent so much time waiting at stations that the long, iron-armed benches, the click of the telegrapher's key, the companionship of draymen and drummers, the regularity of irregular hours, had become a familiar part of his routine. He had spent as many hours on station platforms as on lecture platforms; and he had grown set in his ways.

The letter was signed " Elmore Lannigan, circuit manager." Dr. Runkell had met Mr. Lannigan at one of the fall conventions. Some time during the season, he would come out to see how the program was going. Runkell would see him then, and would tell the circuit manager what he thought of the type of people furnished him for his prelude. He would also give vent to his opinion concerning the innovation in transportation methods.

By the time the lecturer came down from his room, the shadows of night were falling, and to his ears there came the notes of a saxophone as they floated off over the darkening prairies. The Damerons were holding forth.

Dr. Runkell had always held that the Chautauqua movement in America was on an exceedingly high plane. It had brought to the people the leaders of thought. Without taking a biased stand for any particular religious denomination or political faith, it had always stood for needed reforms, had been the means of lending enlightenment on world affairs, and had furnished entertainment, education, uplift, and inspiration. Dr. Runkell had taken deep pride in being connected with such an institution; but from his chair on the Commercial Hotel porch he could hear that the strains from the stringed instruments over on the edge of town, two blocks away, belonged to the style of music known as " jazz."

The fact that Meadowville, strolling past the porch on its way home, seemed none the worse for its evening's experience, raised the perpetrators of the program, in Dr. Runkell's estimation, not a jot. It was true, no doubt, that the public might admire a nice, home-loving couple very much, and yet not care to hear them play the ukulele. On the other hand, it would probably be able to overlook certain peculiarities in the personalities of its entertainers, providing they were capable of rendering " Little Gray Home in the West " in a manner that brought tears to the eyes and a lump to the throat.

That was not the question, however. The audiences were to have the Damerons only during such time as they would be on the platform. Dr. Runkell was to have them at meals three times a day, and to be crowded with them in a car on the highway, as well.

Next morning the lecturer was aroused from his sleep by a rap on his door.

" That you, doc? Thought we ought to get an early start. Fellow down at the garage says we've got a forty-mile jump this morning."

The lecturer was not a profane man, but he muttered on his way to breakfast. He found the Damerons awaiting him. Mae looked a bit sleepy, but Connie was as eager as a schoolboy. The Ford had been intrusted to his guidance.

" I tell you, Mae, a lot of folks are payin' out good money for an outing like this! Here we are, just the same as tourists—given a car to drive, and everything. Nothin' but outdoor air and sunshine after bein' cooped up all winter in stuffy theaters and hotels!"

"We'll send a kodak picture of us back to Peggy—one showing us driving along."

"With me at the wheel," enthused Connie, reaching for the molasses.

There followed a conversation, spoken in a jargon unintelligible to Dr. Runkell, devoted to references to "Peggy" and other characters of a previous existence. Mae depended upon her husband for the answers to her questions about the country to be encountered, and concerning the Chautauqua system. Mr. Dameron's replies were for the most part wrong, but he rendered them with a voice and an attitude so decisive that his wife was left satisfied of his infallibility.

Occasionally Dr. Runkell was moved to offer a correction, but he ended by applying himself wholly to his wheat cakes. Misinformation regarding geography and agricultural conditions would probably make very little difference one way or another to the saxophonist, anyhow. Her faith in her husband's wisdom in connection with any topic that might come up for discussion was, Dr. Runkell saw, unbounded. Connie did the thinking for the two. He had traveled widely and read discursively, and was well versed in the ways and the wiles of the world. His comments were final. Mae never doubted, never disputed.

As Mr. Dameron paid his hotel bill with a certain hurried pomposity, the landlord remarked:

"Sure did like the way you folks played last night. 'Souvenir' and 'Meditation' were my favorites."

"How's that?" asked Connie, turning about in surprise.

Mr. Dameron had been a professional artist since boyhood, and it is the desire to share one's emotions with others that is the incentive for all art, but on his long "four-a-day" vaudeville tours it had been seldom that he had come in close contact with members of his audiences. He and Mae had been accustomed to walking unobserved along crowded streets as they hurried to and from the show houses, meeting only those of their own kind, living constantly in an atmosphere that was artificial. Connie was not as yet adjusted to the fact that a walk of three or four blocks in any direction from the center of Meadowville would land him in a cornfield.

Dr. Runkell, gathering up his baggage, realized more fully than ever, as he watched the musician react to the compliment, what a gulf there was between them. Quite unlike the career of the vaudeville team, his own experiences had been close to country lanes. He had known a great many Meadowvilles, and was thoroughly at home in such an environment.

Mae and Connie seemed to be under the delusion that they were no more beings set apart when they visited the post office than when they were on the stage. When Mae, coming halfway down the stairs, called to Connie, wanting to know if he had seen her massage cream, she seemed unconscious of the fact that the local banker, who was likewise chairman of the local Chautauqua committee, was at the time standing in the office. She and Connie were naïve enough not to realize that the proprietor of the drug store, who had no copy of the *Billboard* on sale, was probably related by marriage to the man in the garage who had tried his best to outline the road to Weeping Willow, and that their conversation to one concerning the other should be guarded accordingly. During their twenty-four hours in town, the sophisticated Damerons had, in their simplicity, stumbled into situations from which they had redeemed themselves only through the rendition of a program which Meadowville, critical from many seasons of Chautauqua, considered all that could be asked for.

The time for departure was now at hand. Connie Dameron led the way to the car that waited over at the Goldenrod Garage. Could the fingers that plinked harmonies on the strings of a banjo manage the steering wheel of a Ford with equal facility? Connie did not know. He had played musical instruments all his life, and his experience with automobiles, thus far, had consisted mostly in dodging them at crossings; but he was undaunted.

The garage owner grinned, but Dr. Runkell, in the back seat, became a little concerned as the machine stopped and started under the banjoist's experimenting.

"You see I have to wait until the engine's going good, Mae, before I put my foot on the clutch."

Connie spoke with all the confidence of one who had driven across the continent, rather than as one who, during a scant half hour the night before, had been initiated into the mysteries of the levers that meant

" reverse " and " stop " and go " ahead." It was somewhat like the starting and restarting of a race horse; but finally they were off.

The country was beautiful at this time of year—the green corn stretching away in rows, birds singing from the posts of the barbed wire fences, a breeze that was perfumed by clover; but Dr. Runkell was about as peaceful of mind as if, without the aid of an anæsthetic, he was being wheeled into an operating room.

Connie's attention was but partially taken up with the car. The wheels bumped over ruts and edged close to roadside ravines, with no lessening of speed, while the driver gave to the woman beside him strange data concerning the crops. Oncoming vehicles were escaped by a hair breadth, but with perfect nonchalance. Connie strayed from the right road, and had to turn back. They ran out of water, and learned that drink for the tin beast was necessary. They experienced a puncture that meant riding for some miles on a rim; but Weeping Willow was reached in time for the afternoon program.

As he climbed, numbly—not nimbly—from the rear seat of the car, Dr. Runkell felt every one of his sixty-five years. His fatigue was not from aching muscles, but from frayed nerves. He thought of the hundred and one towns ahead, and of the mileage which, to the accompaniment of Connie's chatter, he would be obliged to cover in reaching them all.

Speaking in Weeping Willow that afternoon, the lecturer's smile was mostly on the surface. His anecdotes failed to bring their usual response, and his flowery flights were somehow faulty. A resident who had heard the doctor ten years before remarked, on leaving the tent, that " Runkell seemed to have lost his punch."

III

THE circuit had selected its route from the crossroad communities of three States. This territory, being uncharted in Connie's brain, held not the slightest terror for him, but the doctor secretly dwelt upon the distances to be endured. The lines about the lecturer's eyes and mouth, hitherto the chiselings of time " showing where the smiles had been," became sagging furrows peculiar to the cynic.

As they moved westward, Dr. Runkell not only traveled from one town of his circuit to another, but he went over all the vaudeville routes that had known the Damerons. He came to know Sheepshead Bay and its social standards like a book. The unseen " Peggy " was becoming more real to him than those who sat on the front row every afternoon.

" I must see Lannigan," the lecturer hinted, one broiling noon, during a long delay caused by a puncture. " I am told that he is coming out from the office and will be waiting for us at Bradford. I shall see him then. There are several things I wish to say to him."

There was a set look on the doctor's lips which did not escape Connie Dameron's shrewd notice.

" Lannigan?" questioned the banjoist, disturbing the elderly gentleman while he hunted under the seat for the jack and the tire pump.

" The manager," Dr. Runkell explained significantly. " I have been over three of his circuits. He is an old friend of mine."

" Yeah? What you goin' to tell him?"

" Several things."

" Oh!"

Connie dug about until he located the patent patching outfit. To him, the car had taken on human qualities. As its tin surface had tarnished and its axles become mud-caked and its top faded, the machine had somehow worked its way into his heart. Even when it disappointed at a grade or remained stubborn in a puddle, Connie coaxed rather than scolded it.

" Come on, Lizzie!" he would always say.

The terms that he applied were terms of affection. He pampered the roadster, took pride in its accomplishments, forgave its transgressions.

" You've said several times how you wanted to see Lannigan when we got to Bradford. Well, we'll be there a week from to-day!"

The banjoist whistled as he tugged the tire into place. Before starting on, he went to a farmyard and brought a pail of water for Lizzie to drink. A dog snapped angrily at his heels, but did not thwart him from his purpose.

By the time Hanlonville was reached, the last of the women in black silk, the girls in one-piece gowns, the old men with canes, and the boys with Valentino haircuts had come down the maple-shaded streets and were fanning themselves beneath " the brown top." The superintendent — a school-teacher in winter — urged Connie Dameron to hurry into his blue serge and white flannels.

"I suppose you haven't had dinner yet, but the bunch is waiting."

"Sure!" agreed Connie.

Five minutes later the Damerons stepped from the folds of their black velvet, gold-monogrammed "drop" with all the freshness of June's roses. If Mae's features were unduly pink and white, they professionally radiated pleasantry; and there was no gainsaying that Connie, in parting his lips, made no attempt to conceal what the "painless dentists" had done for him.

Dr. Runkell saw the pair start to "pep it up" as he departed for a bit of lunch. It seemed to him that the Damerons were brighter and gayer than usual in their prelude. He had observed, as the days passed, that each audience that he faced appeared in a better mood than the audience of the day previous.

"We've got 'em warmed up for you!" the banjoist had a manner of confiding, as he came off the platform.

By gracious, they would have him talking their slipshod vaudeville lingo if he wasn't careful!

The lecturer's disposition was not a whit improved upon finding that the Gem Café had a sign on its door—"closed on account of Chautauqua." He returned to the rear of the tent, to wait for the Damerons' finale and Connie's grinning exhortation:

"They're yours now, doc. Knock 'em dead!"

But Dr. Runkell had lost his knack of "knocking 'em dead." Back in the closing days of his spring tour he had first been aware of a slump in his powers. Gradually it had dawned upon him that he no longer held his listeners in the hollow of his hand. After his two weeks of rest, he had expected to find his former punch returned to him; but ever since the summer season had started he had known that he was not hitting the mark.

Something had gone from him. He had lost the necessary spark. After a score of years of success, he was slipping.

Stepping before the good people of Hanlonville, Dr. Runkell forgot not a phrase. His voice rose and fell with the same old precision as he asserted that the darkest hour had a way of coming just before the dawn, and that the fellow worth while was the fellow who smiled when everything went dead wrong.

Hanlonville, fanning itself, was courteous but not greatly concerned. If anything, as the effects of the musical prelude wore off, people seemed to relax into a rather sour state. If the lecturer could read their minds—and to a certain extent he could—it appeared very much as if Hanlonville rather thoroughly drifted back to its troubles before the hour and a half was over. When Dr. Runkell had launched into his introduction, even the wrinkled faces had been alert and lighted, as he had seen them of yore; but as he proceeded, it was thoughts of fallen markets, high freight rates, sickness, household cares, and taxes that again held sway, despite anything that he might be saying.

Thus it went. Towns appeared on the horizon only to be left the following morning, after being turned over to the second day program. Ever westward!

Instead of improving, matters grew steadily worse. Dr. Runkell had reached a point where he and the Damerons had less than ever to say to each other.

But his troubles were not only those of travel. At Denberry, at least a third of his audience left *en masse,* on the pretense that a storm was coming up, although the crew-boy sarcastically remarked that the cloud in the sky was probably one of the doctor's silver-lined affairs. A crewboy's slur was the last straw. Dr. Runkell also had an undignified and disconcerting squabble with the proprietor of the Denberry House, because the latter refused to "check him out" for breakfast.

The trio reached Faulkner over a road that was in process of being graded. In time, the lumps would probably be worn down, but it meant missionary work for the car that did the new highway's christening. The tiny black cloud of the afternoon before had been an omen, but the storm held off until the "first day talent" had given to Faulkner its full performance.

Dr. Runkell had arisen from bed to close his window against the swishing rain when Connie Dameron, returning from the grounds, knocked at his door.

"Yes?" inquired Dr. Runkell crisply. "What is it?"

"I was just talkin' to the bird that runs the garage. He says Bradford is a hundred and ten miles, most of the way through sand, and to make it after all this rain we'll have to start mighty early. How about leavin' here at three o'clock?"

"That would be an unearthly hour," gasped Dr. Runkell.

"I know; but the garage man says it would take him that long, and he knows the road. It's the longest jump we've got. Lannigan's to be at Bradford, you said. You've said several times how you wanted to be sure and see him and have some words with him."

"Yes, I have certain things to say to Mr. Lannigan; but if we leave here at three, we'll have no chance for breakfast."

"No, I guess not," agreed Connie, dripping, in the doorway. "I'll call you then. I always sleep light. Wanted to let you know."

IV

It was rather a haggard-looking party that the soggy dawn revealed five miles out of Faulkner, next morning. Connie had sensed the need of putting on chains before starting, and the task had taken time. The road, even at its beginning, was little more than a dim trail over the sand hills. It was practically unmarked, and the map scratched on an envelope, which had probably been clear enough to the native garage man, proved a puzzle to the amateur chauffeur.

A drizzling rain kept the wind shield covered with a mist which Mae, with her handkerchief, sought constantly to sop away. The numberless hills called for a continual shifting of the gears. It was a cattle country, a ditch and bridge arrangement at the far-flung fences thwarting the roving stock from grazing in forbidden pastures, but permitting the progress of automobiles. The groovelike structures demanded plenty of power in their approach, and the ditch awaited if there was any wavering at the wheel.

"It's like the fellow at the garage said," Connie commented, during a delay. "Sand can be tough stuff to go through, but he told me what to do."

The banjoist left the car and gathered grass, which he placed ahead of Lizzie much as a certain gallant of old threw his cloak in the mud that his queen might pass with dry feet.

"If it would just quit raining, now!"

But the skies remained leaden. The cold vapors crept to the very marrow. Dr. Runkell, huddling in his overcoat, noticed, as Connie climbed back into the car, that there was something peculiar about his face. One of Connie's cheeks had lost its drawn look. His left jaw was swollen. Mae remarked about it.

"The painless dentists," Connie explained, his grin grotesque. "Must have put on that crown without treating the nerve. Lack of sleep probably started it, and the damp weather. Wonder if you haven't got a safety pin or something, Mae, so that I could fasten this flap! That's the idea—just the thing. We must have gone all of ten miles. The first hundred are always the hardest!"

Dr. Runkell looked at his watch. Perhaps Bradford might be reached in time, if nothing happened; but things would happen. Only a superoptimist could believe otherwise.

Right now the driver was not sure whether he should have turned to the left or to the right at the last place where the trail had forked. At the top of every hill another hill loomed. The surrounding country, in every direction, was treeless, houseless, fenceless. It was not unlike being adrift in a boat on a tossing sea and without a compass.

In the section where the plains were trying to leave off and the mountains trying to begin, nature seemed to have provided everything that would offer a hazard for a car. Lizzie skidded perilously down the slippery side of a ravine. Connie waited until they reached the bottom in safety before mentioning the fact that his brake wasn't working very well.

"Lucky, wasn't we?" he added.

Yes, they had been lucky, but they were not so fortunate in making the grade on the other side of the gully. The machine, heavily loaded with baggage, partially made the climb, but there was just one bump too many, one bit of incline that was too pronounced. Connie "gave her all she had," but to no avail. It was necessary for all but the driver to get out.

"Peggy ought to have a kodak of you now," chuckled Connie, as he watched Mae trudging the rest of the way up the hill through the driving rain.

A lone horseman suddenly gave a flash of life to the landscape. The bronzed features beneath his flapping hat made it plain enough that the rider was from the near-by Indian reservation. Connie questioned him in the language of Broadway, and received the grunted information that he was out of the road to Bradford. They should have taken the other trail at the fork two miles back.

"What do you know about that, Mae?" remarked Connie, as he engaged in the struggle of turning about. "You've got something to tell your friends back in Sheepshead Bay! I've seen 'em in shows before, but that's the first time either you or me ever saw the real thing right where he lives. Lucky the big chief could talk plain enough to set us right again!"

Dr. Runkell groaned inwardly. The troublesome two miles had to be done all over again. There was a gnawing at the pit of the doctor's stomach, and the prospect of a meal was remote. It was raining harder than ever.

Aware, this time, of the faulty brake, Dr. Runkell held his breath as the car descended again into the gully. The bottom was reached—reached just as Connie, sticking his head out for inspection, guessed that he had a "flat."

"Thought it felt kind o' funny," Connie reflected. "Good thing it ain't the back tire. This one here's been mended a lot before, but the back tire's new. I'd a whole lot rather have it happen to the front tire than the back one."

Connie had not yet become an expert mechanic. It always took him some time to make a diagnosis, and when a tire was once made whole again it had to be cajoled back in place. This particular repair job took a long time.

When Connie returned, Mae called attention to the fact that the right hand that clutched the steering wheel was blood-spattered.

"Yeah—wheel came down on my fingers while I was tryin' to get the tire on. The jack came loose. Thought at first one of 'em was broken, but it ain't. See, I can work it back and forth fine and dandy. May hurt some, for a while, when I'm picking the banjo, but it's just as good as it ever was."

They chugged on, the sandy hills surrendering inch by inch. Noon, and they reached Kanawha — five buildings, counting a converted box car. They were halfway to Bradford. The woman in the restaurant eyed Connie as he spoke of the trip.

"Don't see how you ever made it. Traveling men call it the toughest piece of road in the country. There ain't one of them that has ever tried it who would attempt it in this kind of weather. You say you've got to get to Bradford this afternoon? Good night!"

"You folks go ahead and eat, Mae. There's one thing about my jaw bein' in this shape—saves me board bills!"

Connie splashed over to the filling station, took on more gas, and was waiting for them out in front.

"Lucky we got here," he greeted. "We only had a gallon of juice left in the tank. Wonder we didn't have to back up some of those hills, but we don't have to worry any more about that now. I've got her full to the brim."

Only halfway!

"There's one stretch you'll never be able to make," the woman of the restaurant had predicted.

Dr. Runkell wondered which particular stretch she had had in mind. One mile didn't seem to prove any less impossible than another. There were places when a yacht would have been much more practical as a means of conveyance, and there were gaps that called for an airplane; but Connie kept his faith in Lizzie.

"Just one more hill, mebbe, honey, and we'll see the standpipe in Bradford. That's the baby!"

But the hills were endless, and the scene that met the eye at the crest of each was unchanging. It was long past the hour for the afternoon program. When Dr. Runkell dejectedly called attention to this fact, Connie surmised that there probably wouldn't be any audience, anyhow, on account of the rain.

The machine wallowed on, struggling to retain its equilibrium, hissing from overexertion. Connie expressed his belief that no other car would have made it.

There came a deeper moodiness to the atmosphere. There was less distinction between earth and sky. The sorrowful day was dying. The rain had never stopped for an instant.

"Fellow told me, back in Faulkner, this part of the State had always been dry out here," Connie remarked. Owing to his many efforts as a mechanic, he was soaking wet. "That's why the land is so much cheaper than it is farther to the east. Think what this rain's going to mean to this country! If this keeps up, they'll be able to grow anything!"

Connie's exuberance over what the moisture was going to mean to the crops of the section had scarcely been uttered before there came a clatter and a bang on the car's roof. Hail!

" Can you beat that?" Connie called out. " I've heard about 'em being as big as hen's eggs, but look at those babies! They'll never believe us back in Sheepshead Bay, Mae—never! Look at 'em!"

It was not necessary for Dr. Runkell to peer without. He held one of the huge hailstones in his lap. It had torn its way through the top of the car.

Just at this juncture, the machine, already moving slowly, came to a complete stop. Connie applied more gas, and pushed ahead with his body. It was no use. There had come a change in the nature of the soil. They were sinking in mud. They were stalled.

Dr. Runkell broke the long silence that had characterized his contact with the Damerons *en route*.

" Do you mean to say," he inquired petulantly, " that we are obliged to remain here in this downpour?"

His tone was one of utter disgust. His face was twisted with despair. This was the lowest ebb, the final depth!

Connie turned about in his seat.

" Not on your life, doc! We've pulled out of just as tough places as this. If we hadn't filled up there at Kanawha, I'd say we was out of gas; but we've got plenty of gas. Must be something wrong with the batteries. That's the trouble—plenty of gas, but no spark. We can't make it for this afternoon, anyhow, and it gives me a little chance to get the cramp out of my arms."

He tried to start the engine again, but in vain. The car was settling in its tracks. Lizzie gave the impression of being conquered. She was apparently willing to call it a day and camp down for the night.

Dr. Runkell sank lower in his seat, drawing his coat about his shivering shins. He half closed his eyes. Finally, above the swish of the rain and the clatter of the hail, he realized that Connie was still talking:

" No! I'll tell you, doc, it's always darkest just before the dawn, and every cloud has a silver lining. It's just as you said that first afternoon in Meadowville, when Mae and me was listenin' back there in the dressing room. Mae and me used to crab quite a bit on the road. There used to be things that was trying; but you hit the nail on the head, doc. It's just as you say every afternoon—happiness is more an attitude of mind than anything else. It's a fact. First I was curious to know what your act was, and then, pretty quick, I forgot everything but what you was saying. Thought about myself, and about folks that I knew. All we got to do is look on the bright side. Ain't it the truth, I says to Mae—ain't it the truth? You made it so clear that it was a mistake to make a mountain out of a molehill. If a fellow would only realize that it's a long road that has no turning! Don't get you nothin' to harp on the dark side. If only a fellow would realize that every cloud—"

Dr. Runkell was experiencing very much the sensation of a man who first hears the record of his voice on a phonograph. These were all his phrases—phrases that he had uttered thousands of times—but how strange they sounded! They had become so mechanical through repetition that to his own ears they had become but words—just words. Twenty years with the same lecture—twenty years!

" It's just as you say—everybody has his troubles of one kind or another. It's the way we meet trouble that shows what kind of stuff we're made of!"

Connie was giving the words a glow. He was making the old maxims ring with meaning. He was taking the lecturer's stale sentences and returning them to him fresh. And how thoroughly he was putting their philosophy into practice!

" Nothing's ever so bad but what it might be worse. There ain't been an afternoon that me and Mae ain't stayed and listened. What's this jump to-day? Just an experience that we'll all laugh about next winter. I hate to miss the afternoon date, but outside of that Mae and me have been having the time of our lives. It's all in the way you look at it. We'll pull out of here, you see! We ain't listened to you every day for nothin', doc!"

He reached over and worked the key back and forth in the socket. Finally, as the result of his fussing, he was able to start the engine; but, though the water in the radiator hissed and boiled, the car refused to budge.

" Perhaps, if I get out and push—" Dr. Runkell suggested.

He found one of the rear wheels revolving around and around without striking any substance on which it could take hold; but presently, either because of less weight aboard or because of the extra energy which the doctor lent, the car drew itself out of the muck.

Half a mile farther on, the machine turned into a marked and graded highway. The rain had stopped. As the car slid into Bradford, streaks of sunset glory came into the western sky.

V

THERE was a double program that night, to make up for the missed afternoon performance. As Dr. Runkell, who went on first, came, beaming, from the platform at the close of his address, he found Lannigan waiting for him.

"That was fine, doctor—fine!" glowed the manager, as they gripped hands. "I was watching the faces. You had them right at the start, and they were with you all through. Do you know, you did me worlds of good! You see, with the deflation of crops and the adjustment period and all, some of our towns have been hit pretty hard, and the attendance has been poor. I was a bit in the dumps myself before I heard your talk, but I feel altogether different now. If it could be measured in dollars and cents, you've done those folks out there a million dollars' worth of good. It isn't so much what you say—it's your sincerity, your tone of conviction. That optimism of yours is contagious. Oh, it's great!"

In the lecturer's eyes there was the old twinkle. It was a twinkle that had been missing since these closing weeks of his spring tour.

"Must have had a hard trip to-day, too," Lannigan went on. "We decided to make Bradford because the town wanted us so badly; but it wasn't until yesterday we found out what the roads were. We wired the talent to come on by train, and have the cars brought over, but I guess you couldn't have got the message. From now on the route is easy. This was our only hard jump, and everybody here tells me it was a bad one. Generally speaking, how do you like it by auto?"

"Splendid!" smiled the doctor. "Splendid! To-day was one of those trips that make you appreciate good roads the more; but the new method does away with waiting for trains, keeps us more in the open air, and gives us more time for rest. There are so many night jumps when one goes by train. As you say, we'll soon be in territory where it will mean nothing more than pleasure drives. I like it!"

"Glad to hear it! Do you know, doctor, you ought to be good for another fifteen years! Hair's getting white, that's all. It's the spirit that counts."

There was a pause.

"I hope to be going another twenty years," Dr. Runkell mused almost reverently. "I hope to have that privilege."

Lannigan's voice changed.

"I don't mind being frank, doctor. Our reports on you thus far have not been very glowing this season. We were beginning to think, there in the office, that maybe—well, perhaps that you weren't striking fire any more. The reports were rather consistent." He brightened. "But after hearing you myself to-night — after watching that audience—my doubts are all gone."

"Like the old days, wasn't it?" nodded the lecturer. "Like the old days!"

"By the way," Lannigan continued, "you wrote me several times that you were anxious to see me when I came on. From your hints, I gathered that it was in connection with your prelude. I don't know anything about these people. We got them at the last moment. They were well recommended as musicians, but as to the kind of people they are—"

Dr. Runkell glanced over to the platform, where the swollen-jawed but otherwise debonair Connie was plinking out "Little Gray Home in the West" with bruised fingers. There was attentive silence out in the tent as the familiar strains revived memories and stirred hopes.

"I don't know much about them as musicians," Dr. Runkell finally admitted. "I am not a judge of that; but as people—"

His voice choked and his aged lips quivered.

"You've grown fond of them—that's it," Lannigan helped out.

Dr. Runkell nodded.

It was the recalling of something that Connie had said that enabled the old lecturer to regain his composure — something that chased away the tear with a smile. He spoke absent-mindedly:

"Connie said the trouble with our car this afternoon was that it had plenty of gas, but no spark. I wonder if he thinks Lizzie is the only thing that he got to going again!"

Drums in the Dark

THE STORY OF TWO WHITE MEN ON A JUNGLE ISLAND OF THE TROPICS

By Alexander Hull

NO doubt there are palmy, Elysian islands, neither hot nor cold, insectless but flower-fragrant, girt with beneficent sapphire seas—lotus isles where paradise condescends to be earthly and the earthly reaches up to become paradise, where life is simple, sweet, and Arcadian, and man is—well, scarcely vile at all.

There are such islands, and there is also Maiangoa.

Maiangoa is more like a point of land than an island. From an area of thousands of square miles of low country it projects into an estuary the color of campers' coffee dosed with condensed milk, many sluggish miles wide, and infested by crocodiles and deadly fevers. Still, by virtue of a narrow cross channel, it is actually an island.

The equator is a few degrees distant: hell, either of the two white men at Maiangoa would have admitted, is undoubtedly much nearer. While there are myriads of insects of biting and stinging and fever-transmitting habits, the variety and number of flies is something quite beyond the imagination. They breed in the decay of the slimy forests that close in upon Maiangoa, and they hover in dense black clouds around every creature that lives—or lies dead.

As for odors, no mere Latin derivative can do Maiangoa justice. It smells to high heaven. It reeks. Of what? Not just of mud, nor of vegetation, nor of primitive peoples and crawling creatures. These odors are in it, true; but over and above them there is the smell of a vast and horrible tropical corruption of unfathomable source.

No place for a white man, and poor enough for the natives. The climate is deadly. The black men die among the slimy mangroves like flies. The white men, being fewer, wiser, better provisioned, and supplied with drugs—well, at least they may continue to exist.

In a world filled with garden spots, why should men dwell in such a place? Nevertheless, the Intertropic Trading Company established a post on Maiangoa. There was not much trade, the natives being too listless and enervated to bring in a great deal. One had to look beyond the immediate trade for the reason. The point was strategic, or supposed to be. It was at the mouth of a big river. The back country, now unproductive, was potentially rich. The company was forward-looking.

It was three months between boats. Why will men go to such a spot, mere agents, for no great pecuniary reward, and suffer? To that riddle, of course, there are many answers.

With Stephen Mayfield it had been partly youth, partly a thirst for adventure, partly curiosity. He had wanted to see the tropics, and of course he hadn't known what Maiangoa was like. All these motives had long since been satisfied. He was deathly sick of the horrible place.

He had stuck to it for eighteen months, mainly because he was too stubborn to admit at the outset that the island had, in the vernacular, got his goat; but he was going now. He was going back to the States. He was going on the next boat, and that might be any day. God willing, it might even be to-morrow!

He had fallen heir to a small competence in a small Middle Western town with wide streets, stores with false fronts, and ancient hitching posts. Beyond the stores there were little white cottages. The orderly green armies of the corn marched straight up to the picket fences of the cottages. There was frost on the pumpkins, in the autumn, and there was ice on the ponds—ice—ice! Steve Mayfield was going home!

Nor was this desertion, for the last boat had brought a notification that henceforth Maiangoa would be a one-man station. The year before, a pestilence had decimated the already scanty contributions of the black men in the mangroves. The company had designated Herron as the man to stay; and, oddly, Herron had scarcely seemed to mind.

Steve Mayfield, standing in the visibly steaming compound, frowned as he thought of it. The truth was that there was something wrong with Paul Herron. He was up to something!

Herron had succeeded the man who was at Maiangoa for nearly four months after Mayfield's arrival. That man, Jones by name, had succumbed to fever. Steve, after heaping brush about the dead man's sleeping quarters, had cremated the body and had notified the company. No other course was safe, or possible.

In the interim before the arrival of a successor, the lone white man nearly went mad from the ghastly and threatening jungle silence. Then Herron came, and for a time he was friendly enough; but the friendliness had ended long ago.

What was the matter with him? Drink, of course; but that wasn't all of it. What was he up to? Steve didn't know exactly. Something to do with the natives, and something utterly abhorrent.

It was likely, for one thing, that Herron was a trifle mad. He had been touched by the malevolent, brassy sun, or by fever, or by the nameless, horrible thing that is the evil spirit of the evil tropics.

Convinced of this, Steve had put up with Herron's growing enmity, had sedulously avoided an open rupture. No matter what devilish business Herron might be about, it would have been folly to let the situation come to violence between them, the only two white men within reasonable distance. It hadn't been easy, exactly. The climate had its effect upon Steve's nerves, too; but he had done his best. They were both white, both American. Fight? Madness, indeed! And Steve had succeeded—at least, unless they quarreled before the boat arrived.

Well, they wouldn't. As a matter of fact, if the boat came to-night, as she very well might, they might never see each other again; for Herron again was missing.

Steve left the warehouse and crossed the compound. The heat was damp and stifling, and he was very tired. He had spent four maddening hours getting the shipments ready for the arrival of the steamer—work that should have been Herron's; but Herron had been gone two days.

The first time Herron disappeared, Steve had been alarmed. He had conscripted native guides and gone out to search for his colleague's remains, for he hadn't expected to see the man alive again. He had found him in a native village, bestially, unspeakably under the influence of some native drug.

Herron, returning, had boasted that he had been initiated into a native secret society, that he meant to become a thirty-third degree man, a high muckamuck, to gain control over the natives and become rich. All the same, the man was ashamed. He wouldn't meet Steve's eyes.

"Are you crazy?" demanded Steve. "Don't you know what 'll happen? They'll lose all respect for you, and they'll murder you. One of their witch doctors will stick a knife into you some night!"

Herron grinned derisively.

"And how, in God's name, could you, a white man, ever stomach the unspeakable orgies that—"

"My stomach's my own affair," said Herron, suddenly angry.

Well, it was, of course. The natives were addicted to the use of some particularly vile narcotic weed, and in their so-called religious orders its use played an important part. The plant produced an apathy, interrupted by brief spells of mad and uncoördinated activity. One of its stigmata was an angry inflammation of the eyelids.

Upon the sodden native its effect would be appreciably less than upon a white man's more susceptible organism. Steve suspected that Herron had used the drug more than once. Besides, mingling with the black men upon terms of equality was utterly fatal to the prestige and morale of the white man. After all, wasn't it, to an extent, Steve's business?

Nevertheless, five minutes of expostulation had convinced him of the futility of trying to influence Herron. There was, he had for some time suspected, a streak of looseness in the fellow which accounted for this folly.

At home in America, Herron would probably have descended no farther than to dabbling in mild dissipations; but that was exactly the man for whom the tropics were fatal. Here there could be no such thing as moderation. One misstep began the inevitable descent into the abyss. It meant that the white man would eventually " go black "—an unspeakable infamy. Yet what would it avail Steve to quarrel with his colleague?

" Suit yourself, Herron," he said abruptly. " I'm not attempting to dictate to you. I'm only warning you."

" Good thing!" muttered Herron thickly.

A few weeks later he slipped out of the compound into the reeking bush, and was again invisible for several days. He returned as silently as he had gone, and slept in his bungalow for thirty-six hours in the stupor of utter exhaustion.

Mayfield said nothing, and ignored the incident. Horrible thing, nevertheless! Without question, the man was working his own doom. Either the jungle would swallow him up without a trace, or he would go mad in the end. Well, Steve would not be here to see it.

II

Steve crossed to his bungalow, and in a few minutes came out again. Immense black clouds had climbed the sky, and were rearing their billowy and menacing tops just above the tangled green of the jungle. Within an hour there would come darkness and storm.

Steve crossed the hundred feet of ground that separated his sleeping quarters from those of Herron. Beneath the bamboo floor of the veranda lay Herron's servant, dead to the world, snoring, unconscious of the biting black flies that swarmed upon him. As Mayfield mounted the steps and entered the bungalow, the boy didn't interrupt even for an instant his rhythmic and stertorous breathing.

" Herron!"

But Herron had not returned.

Steve stood for a moment in indecision. Then his eye encountered a photograph on the table.

A girl, flushed with youth and charm, with clear eyes which were pools of innocence, yet which looked out at the world with wistful bravery. She was lovely, she was—oh, so obviously!—all that was sincere and sweet.

It was not the first time Mayfield had seen the picture. On the day of Herron's arrival at the post, he had watched it fall from the newcomer's packing bag. He had stooped, retrieved it from the floor, and given it to Herron, who, with a short laugh, had carelessly tossed it upon the table.

Half a hundred times since, Mayfield had seen the photograph, always lying upon that table, amid a disorderly accumulation of toilet articles, smoking things, and miscellaneous junk. It had become so worn and battered that only the faintest trace of the original inscription remained:

To dear Paul—Elsie.

That first night, seeing it, something queer happened to Steve Mayfield. Perhaps the silence and horror of the months he had just passed with Jones, the sick man, had had something to do with it. Perhaps it was his loneliness. Such experiences immeasurably quicken the moving arc of a man's emotional progression.

Whatever the explanation, the picture had touched to flame some spiritual candle that burned deep within him. It was something like a miracle—to pass, between one moment and the next, from free to bond; but Steve Mayfield had done it. He had fallen in love with a cabinet photograph.

He stifled a deep surge of feeling as Herron flung the pasteboard on the table, and said quietly:

" Pretty girl! A relative?"

Again Herron laughed briefly.

" Hardly," he said ironically. " Just a girl I was engaged to, back home."

A girl—not even *the* girl! Patiently, casually, Steve went on:

" Was—and now aren't?"

Herron faced him, smiling.

" Well, I hardly know. I suppose I might say I still am, if I want to be!"

" Yes?"

" You see—er—Mayfield, I've done quite a bit of the world since that time. Five years and a half since I saw her last. She was a nice little thing. Well, my taste for nice little things isn't exactly what it was. I like something spicier now; but suppose I should change my mind again? I haven't quite broken the affair off. Little Elsie is still waiting for me — if I decide to go back."

" I see!" said Steve, very quietly.

Herron had convicted himself. Steve knew, now, what sort of man had come to be his assistant; but nothing was farther from his mind than revealing himself to

Herron. He changed the subject, but reverted to it later, and finally learned the girl's name and her town.

To-day, as he looked at the picture, it cast its old spell upon him. He sank into Herron's chair by the table, and was lost in reverie.

Yes, such a girl might be faithful. Seeing Herron as he was now, Steve could legitimately doubt the faithfulness of any woman to such a man; but he remembered that Elsie Merritt had not seen him since he came to Maiangoa. His deterioration, once begun, must have been rapid in the fetid air of the tropics, where evil things grow monstrously.

Perhaps — probably — Paul Herron, in those days gone by, was just an ordinary young man with pleasant manners, and with no hint of the dry rot that had begun within. The girl was very young. Some chance bit of glamour about him, now gone, might have blinded her. She had been faithful, perhaps, not to the actual Herron, but to her ideal, to the man she supposed him to be.

To believe that she would remain faithful when she had seen him again was to give the lie to all that lay in those candid, clear eyes of hers. Being faithful to her ideal, she must needs reject the actual Herron.

If, thought Steve, he could only take Herron back to her, so that she could understand! For he meant, as soon as he reached his own country, to go to Elsie Merritt, to ply a suit that he feared might be utterly unsuccessful.

There was an outburst of mocking laughter behind him. Steve wheeled abruptly, and sprang to his feet.

" Herron!"

For it was Herron who had slipped in, caked with the slime of the jungle, barefooted, red-eyed. He had slipped in like a snake, noiselessly.

" Mooncalf!"

Mayfield flushed, knotted his hands into fists, then unclenched them.

" Mooncalf!" repeated Herron.

" Don't be a fool, Herron!" said Steve quietly.

" Me? A fool? Never!" declared Herron. " I wouldn't poach on your little specialty!"

" Stop it!" said Mayfield. " I'm pretty well fed up with you, anyway. I've been sweltering all day over your shipments, while you—but it's silly to quarrel now. I'll be gone in a few days at the outside. Let's keep the peace."

An evil grin appeared on Herron's grimy, unshaven face.

" Yes, you'll be gone," he remarked, with a sort of inexplicable, sardonic pleasure in his tone. " You'll be gone—and a damned good riddance!"

" That's all right, Herron."

" Is it? I don't think! What are you doing in my quarters, mooning over my girl? How do you get that way? All right! You'll change your tune before long!"

Something in his voice suggested a definite implication in this indefinite threat. Mayfield again forced his anger down.

" You'll pipe another song!" Herron went on. " Until the boat comes and you go, I'd advise you to stay out of here. I can get along very well without you driveling over my girl!"

" Your girl!" said Steve contemptuously.

" Yes, mine — mine! You didn't think *you'd* ever get her, did you?"

" I don't know; but, by Heaven, you've had your chance, and you've lost it! You could have kept yourself clean and decent. You didn't. I don't know what sort of a chance I've got, but I warn you I'm going to take it! She's nothing to you, and never has been. I'm going home, and I'm going after her!"

" Good hunting!" said Herron, with a sinister chuckle.

As he spoke, the rain began. It fell straight down in huge drops, striking the beaten ground as with the thunder of countless millions of little thudding feet. The light sensibly lessened, and though it was still two hours until sunset the interior of the bungalow grew almost dark. Herron lighted his kerosene lamp, which hung from a wall bracket, with a reflector of quicksilvered glass behind it.

" Going?"

" In a minute," said Mayfield. " There are one or two things to be said about the shipments, though. The ivory doesn't tally."

" Insinuating that I've—er—misplaced any of it?"

" No, but your reports will have to be altered. That's up to you. I won't do it. You'd better do it soon. The boat—"

He broke off. Above the steady, subdued roar of the rain a hoarse, long-drawn bellow rose and soared, booming over the river and the jungle. The sound died away, and then, at a short interval, came again from the distance.

"The Mesurado!"

"Exactly," agreed Herron. "The natives sighted her two hours ago. That was what brought me in."

Mayfield hesitated. Then he said:

"Herron, let's part friends. The Mesurado will be in the river within an hour. I'll go aboard to-night. You don't owe me any enmity. As for Elsie Merritt, you know yourself she's out of the question for you. You'll never go back to her. You haven't the least intention of doing so. You've no right to hold on to her. She ought to have her chance for life and happiness. If I can give it to her—"

Suddenly Herron dropped on his bed and burst into wild laughter, holding his muddy sides, rocking back and forth deliriously. That very word, indeed, passed through Mayfield's mind. Herron, he was certain, had been using the native drug, and delirious was exactly what he was.

"You-oo-oo'll k-k-kill m-me!" gasped Herron. "You f-f-fool! She's on that b-b-boat!"

III

What was that? The man, of course, was mad; but had he said that the girl was on the Mesurado?

"She's on that boat," repeated Herron. "Lord, what a joke! You're going home, are you? Going to go right after her? Going to marry her — generous man! — and give her her chance for happiness and life? Beautiful! But she'll see plenty of life right here at Maiangoa, don't you think? And as for happiness—"

"Stop!" cried Mayfield wildly. "Are you crazy with drugs, or are you telling me the truth?"

"I've known you were going for months, haven't I?" asked Herron. "Well, what did you suppose I was going to do? Stay here alone, and go jungle mad?"

"By Heaven, you're that now!"

"Not yet—not yet," mocked Herron; "nor going to be. Thoughtful of you to wish it, but I'm going to spoil your little plans. I wrote her. Last boat I got her answer. She'll be on the Mesurado."

"You wouldn't *dare* do as rotten a thing as that!"

Herron laughed.

"And she wouldn't come," Steve continued. "No girl would come—to this. It would be as good as suicide!"

"Listen," said Herron. "You don't suppose she knows what she's coming to, do you? Not unless she's learned on the way; and I gave pretty clear orders to Captain Mack. I think he'll have kept his mouth shut, all right. Five pounds over passage money if he has. Trust old Mack! He wouldn't lose twenty-five bucks. Did you think I was as big a fool as that? Not likely! I painted her a nice, idyllic picture of the sort of place Maiangoa was—waving palms and pretty coral beaches—little bungalow all vine-clad in a garden of tropical flowers—fine, high-minded natives—dear old missionary and his sweet-faced wife living just over the brow of the little hill by the house—all love and happiness in Arcady—beautiful! It brought the tears to my eyes while I was writing it. Oh, she's coming, all right! Sorry to dash your friendly little arrangement, Mayfield, but she's coming!"

"If I believed you—"

"Open the drawer on the right there," suggested Herron. "You'll find her last letter, I think."

Mayfield hesitated. Then, with a resolute movement, he opened the drawer. There was a letter there. He took it out, fingering it as if reluctant to look at it.

"You needn't be delicate. Read it!" urged Herron ironically.

With sudden decision, Steve took the letter from its envelope.

"Herron," he said, "if you've done this thing, knowing that she loved you — not you, but the man she thought you were—I think I'll kill you!"

"I'd have some say about that, wouldn't I? I've been keeping my eyes open for that little thing right along. Trust me! Besides, it's too late. A few weeks ago you might have got away with it. How easy to file a report of 'missing'! But you've lost your chance now. With the Mesurado already in the river, you'd be rather put to it to dispose of the remains, don't you think? Though, of course, if you've a taste for hanging—well," he drawled, rising, "hurry up. Read it and go. I've got to be at my toilet, for this is my wedding morning!"

One glance at the letter brought Steve a horrified conviction of the truth of Herron's words. The reaction to that conviction was muscular and almost instantaneous. Herron hadn't time even to attempt to draw the gun that proved, later, to have been in his pocket. Mayfield's fist caught him squarely on the point of the jaw, and he was catapulted backward with terrific force, until he brought up against his bed and fell forward, striking the floor with a dull crash. He did not stir.

Suddenly Steve Mayfield's anger oozed away. It was not the time for anger, but for quick and cool action. Action? Well enough to say action, but what?

For an instant he had a wild notion of tying Herron hand and foot, carrying him out into the jungle, and leaving him there, under the guard of his servant. He would explain to Elsie Merritt that Paul was three weeks dead of the fever; and when the Mesurado had sailed, the servant could release the prisoner.

What, leave him ensconced in who knew what shrine in Elsie Merritt's heart? His death would wipe out his deceit and leave her her old ideal of Herron to cherish. Moreover, what was to hinder Herron from making a later resurrection? Perhaps he would reappear just in time to hoist Steve on the petard of his own lies.

No thoroughfare that way!

He noticed, as he stood there, that the rain had ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Only the drip from the bungalow and porch was to be heard. It was exceedingly still now—not a breath of air stirring. The rain had not cooled the atmosphere. A vile, sticky heat hung over the earth.

He became conscious of another sound—a faint, distant booming. The tom-toms of the natives were beating in barbaric rhythm. A feast or a funeral, a festival or a war, was perhaps impending. Black men were dancing out in that dripping, labyrinthine maze of vine and tree, on business that was no concern of the white man—no concern of Steve's, at any rate, for he was quitting this pesthole. Perhaps Herron knew what it was about, though.

The dull, measured thumping went on. It would probably go on all night—perhaps all the next day and night as well, for that matter. Steve reverted to his problem.

He couldn't kill Herron, couldn't even pretend that Herron was dead. It would be futile. There may also have been at the root of this decision his reluctance to lie to Elsie Merritt.

He heard a movement behind him, and turned quickly. Herron had recovered consciousness, and was fumbling with his right hand at his pocket. A clairvoyant flash saved Steve, and he sprang upon Herron just in time to wrench the revolver from his hand.

"For safety's sake," he said grimly, "I'll keep this." He dropped it into his own pocket. "And I'll suggest that you'd better be careful. I *might* use it. I think I ought to!"

"But you won't," asserted Herron, struggling to his feet. "Oh, I knew that! You haven't the nerve."

"I'm not sure of that," said Steve. "I've a notion you *could* go to lengths sufficient to improve my nerve. If I knew—"

If he knew! There was the girl, a third and undetermined factor. Suddenly his diagnosis of her assailed him with doubts of its authenticity.

Suppose he were wrong? Suppose Herron could put it over? He was a blackguard and a brute and a coward, but that might not be evident to the girl at a glance. That he had grossly lied to her, of course, she would know — probably she knew it already. The mere sight of the muddy bar, the swollen yellow river, the water-soaked jungle, would tell her that. Maiangoa had no best foot to put forward. It was, immediately, its evil and unhealthy self. The green gardens, the waving palms, the house of the missionary—no, she would know he was a liar; and yet—would it alienate her?

Suppose Herron were clever enough, as he just was, to say:

"I was afraid to tell you the truth—afraid you'd never come—and I needed you so! I felt that without you I should go mad! Forgive me—forgive me—because I wanted you so!"

That was an appeal to shake a woman! With a girl like this it might succeed. Might? No, by Heaven, it *would!* Mayfield had a sickening conviction of it.

"If I knew what to do—"

Herron, realizing himself safe, declared insolently:

"*You* can't do anything. It's out of your hands!"

Mayfield did not heed him, but, coming suddenly from his abstraction, he went on:

"There *is* one thing I can do, and I'll do it—not for you, but for her. Rather than leave her here with you, even though she is willing to stay, I would kill you; but it needn't come to that. If, after she sees you and has heard you excuse your damnable lies, she still cares for you, you can go home with her. I'll give you a letter that will get you a job—a better one than you deserve. She'll at least be in a civilized land, where she can get help if she wants it, and where you can have another chance—a chance to come back and be decent."

"What?"

"If she wants you."

"And you stay here?" demanded Herron incredulously.

"I'll stay until the next steamer, so as not to go with you. As far as the post is concerned, it can rot, for all of me; but I'll hold it down to release you, until the Intertropic sends another man next trip."

"You—fool!" said Herron queerly.

"No doubt. You accept?"

"Accept?" cried Herron.

Suddenly he began to shake. He broke into wild laughter, which ended in prolonged, unrestrained sobbing. He caught Mayfield's arm presently, and clung to it feverishly.

"You mean it? You really mean it?" he stammered. "My God, you do!" He sank on the bed, wringing his hands. "I—I need a bracer," he whispered.

IV

Just then the long, hoarse blast of the Mesurado's siren rent the air with a bellow like that of some monstrous antediluvian beast. Herron started as if he had been struck.

"I—I can't face her—yet," he whimpered. "For God's sake, Mayfield, hand me that bottle from the cupboard! I'm unstrung. Give me a little while—half an hour—to get myself into shape! Tell her I've been sick—something—anything. I'll be ready when you get back."

Mayfield hesitated an instant.

"Very well," he said. "I'll go."

"That bottle!" gasped Herron.

Theoretically, of course, the man was better off without it; but practically—Steve shook his head. Herron was all shot to pieces—the result of his debauch with the natives.

As Steve hesitated, Herron staggered to his cupboard and caught the bottle in a trembling grasp.

"Better take a big shot of quinine with it," Steve advised. "You'll need it."

"I—I know it," whimpered Herron, drawing the cork.

Taking Herron's gun from his pocket, and tossing it on the table, Steve Mayfield walked out, went down the bungalow steps, and turned to the river.

The misty darkness was closing down over the water. In another quarter of an hour it would be dark. The Mesurado, however, just at that moment put her nose around a point of banyans two hundred yards distant, quickly lost way, and for an instant drifted. Her anchor chains played out with a splash.

Steve Mayfield sprang into the boat moored at the compound wharf, and rowed across the intervening water. A moment later he climbed to the deck of the Mesurado. A girl came swiftly toward him from the bow, saying:

"Paul! Paul!"

And then, just as she reached him, she paused and said, with a sort of breathless and frightened surprise:

"Why, you aren't Paul!"

Her voice, her face, completed Steve Mayfield's undoing. She was exactly everything that he had imagined her to be. He shook his head.

"No—I'm Stephen Mayfield. Paul is ashore. He asked me to come for you."

"I don't understand," she said, searching his face. "This—this isn't what I thought I was coming to!"

"Paul will explain that," he said.

"Then he's not ill? He's here, and all right?"

"Yes."

The girl gave him a brave little smile of relief.

"I'm ready to go ashore now, Mr. Mayfield," she said.

"Good! Your baggage—we'll see to that to-morrow. In any case, you'll want to stay aboard to-night. Shall we go?"

As they crossed the water, and came up the incline to the compound, she asked no further questions. She seemed, indeed, to have determined that she would not do so; but her eyes were busy. Steve caught her glances of surprise, of dismay, of fear.

They came along the muddy path toward Herron's bungalow. From within, the reflector of a lamp cast a sharp beam into the darkness. Where was Herron? A vague uneasiness came over Mayfield. He called, as they neared the steps:

"Herron! Herron!"

And Herron appeared in the door. Steve uttered an exclamation. Like a flash, he realized what had happened. Herron, shaken by drugs, by fatigue, by emotion, had had his bracer. Probably he had drained the bottle; and though ordinarily this might have had slight effect upon him, in his weakened condition it had promptly gone to his head.

He was maudlin drunk. He still held the bottle in his hand, and, waving it gayly, he cried:

"H'lo, my honey! H'lo, my dear! This is my wedding m-m-mahorning!"

He stepped gingerly across the porch, negotiated the first step, missed the second, and came headlong down, sprawling at their feet in the mud.

The girl shrank back against Mayfield, and, but for him, would have fallen. Steve felt her swaying in his arm, heard her moan under her breath. She found her voice at last, though it was but a whisper.

"Oh, I'm afraid!" she said. "I'm so afraid!"

"You need not be," said Steve gently.

"What is this terrible place?" she asked. "And he—like that! Oh, I'm afraid! I want to go away from here. I never should have come. I—I didn't know! Please take me away! Help me!"

"I'll help you," said Steve. "We'll go aboard the ship at once. You'll be safe. To-morrow she sails. I'll tell you what has happened; but until then, remember—you're safe—safe with me. I'll let nothing touch you—nothing hurt you."

She looked at him, her lips trembling, a mist of tears swimming in her dark, sweet eyes. The light of Herron's lamp shone full upon Steve's face; and as the girl looked at him, her fright visibly diminished. He saw it, and smiled reassuringly.

"You're safe. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes," she said brokenly. "I—I do—believe you!"

When they reached the deck of the Mesurado, she gave a deep sigh, as if she had reached a haven. Turning in the darkness, she said:

"I don't quite understand yet. This *is* Maiangoa?"

"It is."

"It is so—so utterly different from what I expected. I expected—"

"I know — white sands, waving palms, flowers, and—I read your letter."

"You read it?"

"Yes—scarcely an hour ago. I didn't know, until then, that you were coming. He told me. It was too late to warn you; but, believe me, I would have given anything to save you this!"

"Is he—often that way?"

Steve gave her the truth bluntly.

"He's often worse."

She shuddered.

"How strange and hard life is, isn't it? If one doesn't learn easily, it teaches one forcibly. I've been blind—blind. That isn't Paul Herron — not the Paul Herron that I knew. All the while I had misgivings about coming. Sometimes I wondered if, after all, I really loved him. You see, it had been so long, and only a few letters, far apart. I had misgivings, but I argued them away. I remembered him only as I had seen him on one unforgetable night. His letters, too—sometimes he wrote a beautiful letter."

Steve smiled grimly as he remembered Herron's words:

"It brought the tears to my eyes while I was writing it."

They were on the very tip of his tongue, but he suppressed them.

"I can't stay—I can't stay," the girl went on, in deep distress. "I never should have come! I didn't realize! What shall I do?"

"Go home," said Steve sternly. "It would be madness to stay. God knows it isn't treachery to say it, but bitter truth. It would be physical, moral, and spiritual death for you to stay here. Go home!"

"Are you going ashore now?"

"Yes."

"Then tell him, please, that I'll see him in the morning, but that he mustn't hope for—no! Just tell him that I'll see him."

"I'll tell him."

As he turned to go, he noticed that the monotonous thudding of the natives' drums was nearer—much nearer. Now they seemed to come from across the compound to the south, whereas earlier, they had come from the north.

"Listen!" he said.

Mysterious and terrifying, incessant, the rhythmic beat echoed through the jungle, across the black, glistening water. It was a voice from the primitive past, savage and cruel.

"That's Maiangoa," said Steve. "Brutal—eocene! Black men, only a step or two beyond the ape, beating their drums—hollow segments of trees covered with hides—and dancing their bestial ceremonies.

Festering forests, deadly fevers, unendurable heat, incomprehensible savagery—darkest Africa!"

She made a faint exclamation of horror.

"You never could stay there! But I've told Herron this—if, after you've seen him and talked with him, you find that you still—" He couldn't quite bring himself to the words. "There's a job waiting for him back home. There—"

He broke off.

Suddenly, at quick intervals, three shots sounded ashore. As if at a signal, the native drums for a moment stopped beating. It was as if the jungle's heart had stopped beating, as if it lay, a black, formless, evil monster, dead—

For a little while the only sound was that of the swish of the river against the rusty sides of the Mesurado. Then a door opened, a lozenge of light appeared, and, framed in it, Captain Mack.

"Did you hear those shots?" he inquired. "What was it?"

"I don't know," replied Steve.

"I don't like it," declared the captain. "The sound of those cursed drums—hello, they've stopped!"

"I think I'd better go ashore," said Steve. "Herron's been bothering the natives—influencing them against the witch doctors. It may be nothing, but I think I'd better go ashore."

Captain Mack nodded.

"All right—maybe you'd better. I think I'll send half a dozen men with you, though. You don't suppose— Wait a minute! I'll go along."

V

The lamp in Herron's bungalow was still alight, sending its unflickering radiance into the darkness. Ten feet from the house, they stumbled over a form—Herron's servant, quite dead, a bullet wound in his head. On the steps sprawled a second body, grotesquely daubed with clay paint, masked, garishly decorated with plumage and grasses, its neck hung with the useless amulets of the witch doctor.

Across the threshold lay Herron, his chest transfixed by a long, barbed spear.

The tale was complete. Herron's warfare with the witch doctors was forever at an end, and the evil gods of the black men again ruled the tribes.

"I don't like it!" muttered Captain Mack.

Steve Mayfield stepped into the bungalow. On the table lay the battered photograph of Elsie Merritt. He picked it up, buttoned it in his pocket, and turned to the door.

"I don't like it!" reiterated Captain Mack. "You've a bit of cargo here, you say?"

"Very little."

"I had a message for him," said the captain, nodding toward Herron. "Better read it."

The message ran:

> Intertropic Trading Company insolvent. No further salary. Advise abandon post at Maiangoa.

"Now it's like this," said the captain. "The Intertropic isn't anything to me, nor its dinky cargo here, nor any of its confounded creditors, either; but my ship is. What I say is, get your stuff together—just your personal belongings—and get aboard. We'll bury Herron under the house, and fire it. I'd rather take a chance with the bar than with these cursed natives. They've had a taste of blood, and it makes them wild. Listen!"

Again the jungle heart had begun its beating—boom, boom, boom, boom. Again the beating was remote, lost in unguessed black depths of the forest; yet who could say what swift and silent death lurked in the shadows just beyond the compound?

"I don't like it!" said Captain Mack, for the fourth time. "I'll take my ship out of here. Come!"

At dawn the Mesurado was at sea. The land was a mere dark smudge on the horizon. Maiangoa was a vivid, evil dream, remembered, but already fast dimming for Stephen Mayfield.

For Elsie Merritt—she was looking at Steve.

"It all seems unreal, as if it had been some one else, not I, who had passed through it. I can't help feeling that I have been found lacking in some way. Love should dare all, bear all; and I—it seems to prove that I—"

"It only proves," said Steve softly, "that love is yet to come!"

"Ah, you think so? I wonder!"

"I know," said Steve.

And though he could say no more then, he faced the sun, rising over the fading smudge of Maiangoa, and greeted it as if it were the dawning of a new life.

The Token

THE STORY OF A STRANGE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The House of Peril," etc.

THE English police are investigating what seems to be an extensive conspiracy engineered by foreigners in England, for purposes which are more or less of a mystery. The Hon. Peggy Mainwaring—daughter of Lord Copmanthorpe, a cabinet minister—and her maid, Monica Jackson, have become involved in the affair through happening to pick up a curiously mutilated coin—a half crown punched with dagger-shaped marks forming the Roman numeral "IV." The losers of this coin, or token, are apparently determined to recover it, for Monica is kidnaped from Lord Copmanthorpe's residence on Curzon Street, in London, and taken to a secluded house near Dorking, in Surrey. The police surround this place, and liberate Monica, though the house is fired by a bomb and its inmates escape through a tunnel. It appears that the place was bought some time before by a Frenchman calling himself Jules Lefèvre.

The police officers playing leading parts in the investigation are Superintendent Winter and Detective Inspector Furneaux, of Scotland Yard, and Superintendent MacDermott and Sergeant Linton, of the Surrey County Constabulary. Sergeant Linton has entered the police after holding a commission in the army during the war. He is evidently much interested in Miss Mainwaring, of whose social status he is unaware, knowing her only as a companion of Monica Jackson, and supposing her to be a fellow servant of some sort. She already has a suitor of her own class—Lord Robert Ferris, an officer in the Guards.

Later developments include the discovery of a second half crown, similarly marked with a number, on a man arrested in London for distributing a dangerous narcotic, and the finding of still another of these mysterious tokens on an Italian, Pietro Ruffini, who is held at Superintendent MacDermott's headquarters, in Dorking.

XIII

LINTON darted a quick look at Furneaux when the latter spoke of the marks on a half crown which had presumably been found on the prisoner when his pockets were searched thoroughly in the charge room.

"Yes," said the detective. "You were right in guessing that those marks represented a number. Miss Mainwaring supplied us with No. 4 yesterday at Box Hill. This fellow possessed No. 24. We have another joker in Bow Street who was intrusted with No. 57. Quite a large organization, it would appear!"

A constable knocked, and entered.

"A gentleman outside, who says he is Lord Robert Ferris, wants to see Miss Mainwaring, sir," he said to MacDermott.

"Lord Robert Ferris! Is he a Guards officer?" cried Linton involuntarily.

"Yes. Do you know him?" snapped Furneaux.

"Quite well."

"Then don't meet him just yet. I'll soon settle his hash!"

The little detective hurried out of the office.

"Why should Mr. Furneaux want to settle Bobby Ferris's hash?" inquired Linton, looking at Winter in genuine amazement.

"If I were to hazard a guess," said the chief, affecting a ponderous style of speech which gave him time to think, "it would be that his lordship is a friend of the Copmanthorpes, who are naturally anxious to know why various members of their household should be in such request in the neighborhood of Dorking. At present, however, in so far as our worst suspicions go, we wish to keep cabinet ministers as much in the dark as the general public."

"But Ferris and I are old friends," said Linton. "I could put things right with him in a minute."

"I rather believe that Mr. Furneaux is now mystifying Lord Robert still further."

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Winter's dry tone revealed more than the mere words. "I make it a rule not to interfere when he acts so decisively. He always has a reason, and it is generally a sound one. What is bothering me at the moment is not Lord Robert Ferris's unexpected presence, but why Pietro Ruffini should deem it necessary to carry a pistol and dagger when he cycles into Dorking on an apparently innocent errand. Who and what is Mr. Thistleton, MacDermott?"

"A highly respected resident in the district," said the superintendent. "He is what is known as a bankers' stockbroker. I would as soon suspect an archbishop of complicity in this affair as an elderly financial man of his type."

"Will you send an intelligent constable to Mr. Thistleton's house to explain that Ruffini is under arrest, and that the police want to receive and answer any telephonic inquiry which may be made for him there during this afternoon and evening? Of course, your man should remain on duty until, say, ten o'clock, and make a careful record if anything turns up, including telegrams and letters. Are your local magistrates to be trusted? Will they remand Ruffini for a week in custody without seeking too full an explanation?"

"They are models of discretion," laughed MacDermott.

"Well—it may be an empty dream—didn't some one hint about luncheon being ready?"

"It's on the table."

But the telephone intervened. It was Mr. Sheldon, speaking from Scotland Yard. Furneaux had not erred when he assumed that Margherita Dubois had hurried away from the Soho restaurant after hearing from Ruffini. Neither the proprietor nor any of the waiters had ever set eyes on her before. They regarded her as an ordinary customer who had made an appointment with a friend for a meal in their establishment.

Sheldon added that he did not expect to receive a reply from Paris for another hour, at least.

"That's all right," said the chief. "You go and eat now, which is what I intend doing. I shall be in the Yard about five o'clock. Have four of our foreign squad ready for a conference. Shelve everything else. This affair is of the highest importance. Tell Sir Arthur I'll be glad if he, too, can arrange to be free then for an hour."

This reference to the chief commissioner showed how serious was Winter's view of matters. Evidently, he was determined that the resources of the Criminal Investigation Department should be placed at his disposal without stint or reserve.

In the flurry of the moment Mr. MacDermott forgot to invite Linton to join the luncheon party, so the latter, scrupulous in the observation of discipline, was left in the room when the others went out. Undecided whether to go at once to his own quarters for a hasty meal, he looked through a window into the street, and was far more annoyed than he cared to confess even to his inner consciousness at seeing Miss Margaret Mainwaring being escorted by Furneaux from the private door of Mr. MacDermott's house to a limousine drawn up behind the detectives' car.

Ferris—whom, of course, Linton recognized instantly—seemed to be surprised by the haste with which the girl and himself were hustled into the vehicle, which set off at once down the London road. Furneaux looked after them, and grinned. Then, since those beady eyes missed nothing, he caught sight of Linton's frowning stare above the wire blind of the superintendent's office window. His expression changed into one of deep concern. He said, quite plainly, without uttering a word:

"Well, well! What's gone wrong now?"

In half a minute he was back in the room.

"Why are you alone?" he cried.

"Mr. MacDermott has taken Mr. Winter to lunch, but—"

"He meant to ask you, of course. He took it for granted you would come."

"Possibly. But—"

"That ass, Ferris, couldn't leave well enough alone. He insisted on escorting Miss Mainwaring back to London, so a very angry young lady had to go with him. If it is any consolation, you may be sure that at this moment Miss Mainwaring regards Lord Robert Ferris with a dislike almost amounting to aversion."

Linton was beginning to feel wary of Furneaux's conversational openings. He tried to laugh.

"That will be a new sensation for Bobby, who is a bit of a dog with the fair sex," he said. "However, I am mainly concerned about Miss Mainwaring. No doubt she was looking forward to hearing a fresh budget of news during luncheon."

"She won't have to wait long," came the careless comment. "She has promised to dine with you and me at eight. Ah, here comes MacDermott, to inquire what the devil is detaining us!"

And, indeed, the worthy superintendent did arrive by the private passage leading from his residence.

"What the devil is keeping you fellows?" he inquired.

Linton had to bite his lower lip hard to choke back a laugh, but Furneaux only muttered that there must be something radically wrong with the whole tribe of common or garden dukes, as their sons were often such frightful asses. At any rate, Linton thought fit not to seek more precise information about the detective's wholly unexpected arrangement for the evening. He had yet to learn that the Yard required his presence in London for an indefinite period.

The all-absorbing topic of the hour was dropped completely during the meal. A casual reference told Linton that Miss Mainwaring had been allowed only a peep at Monica, who was ready to relapse into pronounced hysteria if her nerves were not soothed by frequent doses of bromide. After that, the talk between MacDermott and the detective dealt largely with past experiences.

For instance, it was instructive for a novice in criminology to learn that a highly expert and most daring burglar, who had been run to earth in the Dorking district some years before the war, narrowly escaped being shot for abject cowardice in the front line. He was saved by a sensible medical board, which certified that he was suffering from some abnormal form of neurasthenia. Drafted into a naval dockyard, he picked up some real knowledge of undersea sound detectors, suggested a remarkably ingenious improvement in those novel and highly technical devices, and cheerfully spent the remainder of his war service in a destroyer, listening for enemy submarines—than which few more nerve-racking occupations can be named.

"It's odd," put in MacDermott, "but we used his jimmy to break open that window last night."

"He is now an excellent locksmith, and much valued by his employers, a firm of safe manufacturers," said Winter. "I saw him the other day, and he told me he had applied for a job on the new mystery ship, but I dissuaded him from taking it if offered, as he is over fifty, and ought to settle down into staid citizenship."

"Oh, was *that* it?" snapped Furneaux.

Winter almost blushed. He tried to concentrate on the proper dissection of a chicken's leg, but could not ignore the wrath in his colleague's eyes.

"Yes," he said. "I'll admit it now. You remember the theft of Lady Burgand's jewels, Mac—how a specially devised lock was picked and the safe locked again, just as if some one had the key and knew the combination. Well, I spoke of the affair to our friend, and he, in genuine admiration, blurted out the remark that he thought there were only two men living who could open that lock by listening to the tumbling of the wards. He, of course, was one. I guessed at the other, and, by jing, we got him with the goods!"

"And for a whole week you crowed over me because you had pulled off what you chose to describe as a perfect example of inductive reasoning," complained Furneaux bitterly.

"Well, well, Frog, I meant to tell you some time. I know you hate any one to encroach on your own special method of first finding out what happened, and then pretending you had sensed the whole thing from the beginning."

"You're a comical pair," laughed MacDermott. "It beats me how you've survived a series of stolid chief commissioners. The average county chief constable would die of apoplexy if his detective department conducted police inquiries in your amazing way. As a case in point, I literally wouldn't have dared to blow up that tunnel this morning. I heard the crack, and imagined you had all gone to glory."

"We only escaped by a miracle," said Winter.

MacDermott took thought. He remembered now that the chief of the C. I. D. had glossed over the exact cause of the second explosion in his statement to the press. In fact, Winter was not at all sure what casualties, if any, had resulted.

Linton kept his eyes glued on his section of a fowl. He reflected that things might not always be what they seem, even in the archives of Scotland Yard.

He was asked to pack a bag with sufficient equipment for a week. While he was gone, MacDermott was enlightened as to the identity of Miss Mainwaring. The superintendent opened his eyes widely at this discovery, but Winter, who told him, insisted on the necessity of absolute reticence on that particular point.

" You see," he said, " if once the social position of one of the two girls who met *mon vieux* and his fellow scoundrel outside the King's Head at Box Hill becomes public property, this affair will attain an undesirable notoriety. Even our young friend Linton doesn't know yet that she is other than a superior housemaid in Curzon Street."

" Does she know anything about him?" asked MacDermott.

" I think not. We have kept strictly to business."

" He's a bright fellow. I wonder he hasn't looked up Lord Copmanthorpe in 'Who's Who' or 'Debrett.' "

" Have you?" put in Furneaux.

" A fair hit! But I have been too busy."

" At present we want to avoid complications," went on Furneaux. " Captain Linton dare not flirt with a housemaid, no matter how pretty she may be, and the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring cannot possibly look soulfully into the eyes of a police sergeant."

" Inspector, now," announced MacDermott. " He is in orders to-day—specially promoted."

" Have you told him?" inquired Winter.

" Not yet."

" Well, break the glad tidings when we're in the car. It's high time we were moving."

MacDermott thought he was scoring rather neatly when he said to Linton, a few minutes later:

" By the way, inspector, when the opportunity offers, you might send your uniform into store. Our outfitters have your measurements, and will have your new clothes ready within a few days."

" Have I been promoted, sir?" said Linton quietly. " If so, I have you to thank for it, and I am exceedingly obliged to you."

" You are also recommended for the merit badge," the older man went on. " Possibly that doesn't sound much in your ears, but the ordinary police constable thinks a lot of it, for he knows it has to be earned by real good work."

" I am beginning to realize that side of life in the police," was the modest answer. " A soldier has to take chances in war which, until the past few years, might never come his way at all; but the average policeman may be called on to risk his life at any moment of his thirty years of service, and he never can know what odds he has to face. I assure you, no matter what the future may have in store for me personally, I shall always look back on my experiences here with a lively gratitude to my comrades. They are splendid fellows, every man of them."

" Don't forget to give full play to those admirable sentiments when you're a chief constable," chirped Furneaux.

XIV

Acting on instructions, Linton effaced himself during the press inspection of the ruins of Avenue House, and took care not to figure in any of the photographs for publication. He noticed that Furneaux paid slight heed to the charred chaos within the four walls, but prowled about the outbuildings, and examined every inch of the Ford car standing in the garage, which, as a building, though badly scorched by heat and shaken by air concussion, was fairly intact in other respects.

The reporters, naturally, were mainly interested in the ruined house and in the exciting story told by MacDermott. They were gathered around him and Winter on the lawn when Furneaux crooked a finger at Linton, and led him to the garage.

" Do you understand the mechanism of the internal combustion engine?" he almost whispered, when the two were inside the shed.

" Yes."

" Well, have a peep at the transmission gear. There's a candle. I suppose it is safe enough. Anyhow, I've taken a chance with it already. Don't touch a thing—just look. The inspection pit is quite roomy—big enough for a much larger car, in fact—so you need not soil your clothes."

Linton obeyed without another word. He had been in the pit only a few seconds when he whistled softly, and thrust his head and shoulders higher within the framework of the chassis.

" Can you hear?" he said in a curiously muffled voice. His position, plus the unusual acoustic properties of a sunken rectangle, affected his ordinarily clear and incisive utterance.

" Perfectly," replied Furneaux.

" There is a thing like a bomb here, adjusted in such a way that any movement of the differential will upset it."

"So I thought. Tell me, how could it be detonated?"

"Almost certainly by being turned upon its side, and then set off either by a weighted striker, or, more probably, by the action of some corrosive acid liberated from a tube. The latter method would be nearly infallible."

"Is there much risk in removing it?"

"None, I think. Some one had to fix it, you know. There's a perch actually provided. Anyhow "—the hollow voice ceased for a couple of seconds—" here it is!"

Furneaux, bending, with hands on knees, saw the younger man stooping on the floor of the pit, and holding in his right hand a sinister looking object, fashioned of dull-colored metal, globular in shape, but slightly flattened at the south pole to form a base, and with a screw cap at the north pole.

"Shall I draw the sting?" inquired Linton coolly.

"If you can do so without killing the pair of us."

"Oh, yes—I can promise that. The infernal thing had to be put in order, and the reverse action should be safe enough. But—"

"You want me to hold the candle. Give it to me."

Now both men knew that Linton was not going to mention the candle, which he could have set on a shelf in the pit. He was about to suggest that Furneaux might go outside until called back.

"Really—" he began.

"Winter will be both surprised and distressed if both of us are blown to smithereens," cackled Furneaux; "but, whatever I might have done a minute ago, I certainly must hold that candle now!"

Linton made no further protest. While his companion showed a light, he unscrewed the metal cap and lifted it out carefully. Attached to it by thin wire was a half-inch cylinder of glass, three parts filled with a brown liquid.

"There you are," cried Linton gleefully. "That's a corrosive sublimate, which, when spilled on the chemical compound forming its opposite number, sets up sufficient heat to affect the detonator. Nearly all the high explosives have to be detonated by fulminate of mercury."

"Pass 'em up separately," said Furneaux, "and take another squint at the machinery. Those babies left nothing to chance, and they may have provided a second little joker in case the first one failed."

After further examination, Linton reported all clear, and, in the bright light of a window, the two scrutinized the bomb more closely. It was a well made article. The glass tube had fitted loosely into a cylindrical chamber penetrating nearly one-third of the missile's diameter. It had been surrounded by some whitish gray crystals, which now lay at the bottom.

"If you have an envelope in your pocket, we'll shake those boys out," said Linton. "I believe this bit of frightfulness is of the incendiary variety, and I am not familiar with the actual method of construction."

Furneaux considered.

"Will there be any danger, then, in taking it with us to town?"

"I believe not."

"Quite sure?"

"No—I can't vouch for it. You see for yourself how it works, but I cannot be certain that concussion brought about by an accidental fall might not do the trick."

"Well, here is the envelope for your crystals. Then we'll contrive the accidental fall, to test the thing. If possible, I want the whole apparatus to be in the hands of the Home Office experts to-night."

Furneaux wasted no time over such matters. It was easy to arrange a loose plank so that the bomb would roll into the pit when the plank was moved. If an explosion followed, it could hardly injure persons cowering outside the shed.

The heavy cylinder dropped with a thud, and there were no ill results.

"And now," said Linton, "all we want is a cork for the glass tube."

"Oh, you'll find that in the cupboard where the chauffeur keeps his sparking plugs and other small accessories. I didn't like either its smell or its appearance, and I wondered what had become of the bottle it fitted. That is one reason why I searched so carefully."

A piece of sacking concealed the bomb from other eyes when Linton carried it to the car and placed it beneath the seat. By now the photographers were busy, and MacDermott was giving instructions to the police guard. It was evident that neither Winter nor Furneaux would attempt any detailed scrutiny of the débris until it had been sifted by workmen. Indeed, the local officials undertook to note the place where each recognizable scrap of metal was found

—a task rendered easy by the fact that a builder in the locality had made certain alterations in the cellars to the order of M. Lefèvre, it being understood that the benevolent scientist wanted to experiment in flower and fruit culture by artificial light and heat.

The chief knew nothing of the latest infernal machine until the car was running swiftly along the London road. Then Furneaux told him where it was reposing. Winter had cut the end off a fresh Havana, and was about to apply a match—which, however, he blew out.

"What sort of bomb is it?" he inquired, in a smoothly mellifluous tone which his colleague understood and was delighted at. "I mean, is it to be fired by a fuse or by contact?"

"Neither. Inspector Linton tells me it is of a variety which bursts by merely rolling over—on the lines of a certain type of chemical fire extinguisher."

Winter struck another match, and lighted the cigar.

"I hope you are sitting on it," he said.

"You must learn to control your face," Furneaux said sharply to Linton. "You defeat my best efforts when you start grinning like a Cheshire cat!"

"Suppose you tell me what really happened," said Winter.

The little man cackled shrilly.

"Am I an inspired idiot?" he demanded. "Am I the champion humbug of all the ages? We are not dealing with criminals, but with lunatics. This fellow—Lefèvre, shall we call him?—is not a crook, but a scientific crank, a monomaniac driven out of his senses by a bright vision of some Utopian state which he alone is destined to establish. When we corner him, if we ever do, he will rail at us as the minions of an effete and tyrannical political system. In his eyes we are a pest of green flies eating into the heart of the socialistic rose, and must be removed by the drastic means beloved of gardeners. Do you think he was joking when he spoke to that builder of growing flowers and fruit by artificial light and heat? Not he! It was a serious figure of speech. He means to destroy that he may create anew. The phœnix of his dreams shall rise beautiful and flawless from our ashes. I tell you now that Jules Lefèvre is the most dangerous and highly developed force existing to-day in any separate corporeal entity. We must look for him among the great ones, the thinkers. He simply cannot have reached eminence without leaving a blazed trail of successful achievement. If, to-night, there were held simultaneously gatherings of the most notable jailbirds of Europe and America and the men most distinguished in scientific research, I would expect to find him among the latter, *primus inter pares*."

"Hobnobbing with the president of the British Association, and discussing the vagaries of stellar light with the astronomer royal, in fact?"

"Yes—I mean that very thing."

"He has peculiar friends—Pietro Ruffini, for instance, an Italian ruffian, with pistol and dagger, all complete."

"And a gardener—a mere implement in the new weeding and tilling of humanity."

"Perhaps you're right," conceded Winter. "In any case, I'll follow the worms, such as Ruffini and his like, while you lurk in the library and smoking room of the Royal Society."

Linton listened to this remarkable discussion without daring to take part in it. Were it not for the accumulated proofs of the professional acumen of these two strangely constituted detectives, he might have thought they were raving. As it was, he tried to follow their lines of reasoning. His expression was so grave that Winter smiled broadly.

"Well, young man," he said, "what do you think of us now?"

"I think you are right," came the prompt answer.

"Which of us?"

"Both."

XV

THE commissioner of police, Sir Arthur Monson, made it convenient to attend the conference summoned by Mr. Winter. It was the height of the London season, and he had a rather pressing social engagement, but that went by the board, for, strange to relate, chief commissioners can be just as much interested in their duties as the youngest detective in the C. I. D.

Nine men gathered in Mr. Winter's office, a room on the third floor of New Scotland Yard. Its two windows gave a fine view of the Thames, backed by the curved front of the London County Council offices, with Westminster Bridge and St. Thomas's Hospital on the right, and, as if some utilitarian imp wished to spoil a beautiful picture, the gaunt ugliness of Hungerford Bridge on the left.

But the far-flung vista of South London revealed by the rays of the setting sun did not draw the glance of any man in that company. Sir Arthur, who had obtained from Inspector Sheldon a fairly comprehensive sketch of the incidents already recorded, greeted Winter and Furneaux with genuine friendliness. He shook hands with Linton, saying that he had met his father, the general, and was well acquainted with Colonel Hollies, his mother's brother, chief constable of the county of which, it was expected, Linton himself would take charge, within a year, as head of the police. He nodded affably to the four members of the foreign squad.

Sheldon came in with him. Soon they were all seated around a large office desk. Mr. Winter occupied his accustomed chair, and the commissioner sat next to him. The others arranged themselves in no particular order.

Winter plunged into the case without preamble. For the benefit of the new men who would assist him henceforth in this special investigation, he reviewed all its circumstances from the outset. His exposition was listened to by an intent audience. Sir Arthur lifted inquiring eyebrows when Miss Margaret Mainwaring's name was mentioned in connection with Lord Copmanthorpe's London residence, but a long familiarity with the methods of his two most trusted aids kept him from breaking in with the obvious question.

Winter's statement occupied fully half an hour. It was given without notes, and with a lucidity which would have won the commendation of a King's Bench judge. Not a fact was omitted, not a name forgotten. Linton, who had been minded not so long since to cavil at the curiously airy and detached methods adopted by both Winter and Furneaux, realized at last that the chief was a man of great intellectual power, while his eccentric subordinate was endowed with an intuition which would be uncanny if it were not the outcome of genius governed by long experience.

Photographs of half crowns Nos. 4 and 57 were handed around. The marks on the latter seemed to have been made by the instrument used to deface the coin which Peggy Mainwaring discovered. There was the same brutal intent in the direction of the cuts. On comparing the two the significance of the incised numerals became self-evident.

The commissioner held both photographs side by side in a strong light.

"Sometimes," he said, "I find myself fighting against Mr. Furneaux's psychological theories, but one has to admit a sense of horror, a sort of mesmeric fascination, in these so-called tokens. The mere use of such a word for such a symbol is adroit. And, if fifty-seven have been issued, we have to deal with a widespread organization. What can I do to help, Mr. Winter?"

"I need not ask for your support, sir, since you regard this matter so seriously, but I shall be glad if you will see the permanent under secretary at the Home Office to-morrow, and convince him of the extent and significance of this new menace."

"What, exactly, is the danger you fear?"

"It is twofold. There is a secret movement against the national life, as we know it, and I am looking, at any moment, for a direct attack on ministers of the crown, if not on the crown itself."

"Of course, you will receive all the assistance you need. I think that those now present should devote themselves exclusively to the running down of this gang, and especially of its leader. I must relieve you of other anxieties. You need not be concerned as to the safety of the members of the royal family or the cabinet. Our special preventive measures will be adopted at once. Mr. Furneaux, this should be a chase after your own heart."

"It appeals, sir, it appeals," agreed Furneaux. "It has novel features. Twice, this morning, we narrowly escaped being blown to Kingdom Come. Inspector Linton has had three chances, not to mention the poison gas and Ruffini's revolver. Such incidental episodes elevate sordid crime into Greek tragedy."

The commissioner did not avail himself of this opening into the realms of the higher criticism.

"Certain aspects of the affair strike me as peculiar," he went on. "For instance, assuming you are right as to Monica Jackson being terrorized by a snake, are we to believe that Lefèvre actually kept a snake in readiness for just such a purpose?"

"Mr. Winter and I have already discussed that point. We are prepared to find that a snake was purchased from some naturalist's shop about seven or eight o'clock last evening."

"That is an excellent line. And then the bomb in the car—do you regard that as a precaution taken regularly each night?"

"It must have been so. MacDermott is sure that no one could have slipped out to the garage, adjusted the bomb, and got back again to the house before the poison gas, high explosive, and fire rendered retreat to the tunnel impossible."

The chief's telephone rang. Every one except Linton knew that the call probably concerned the business in hand, since the operator would put no other through unless the matter were vitally important.

It was the Prefecture of Police in Paris speaking. Inquiry at the Maison Marnier, Rue Blanche, had revealed that the lady's costume, No. 17,008, had been sold out of the window as a stock model. The name of the buyer was unknown, the transaction being for cash; but, as it happened, the shop assistant who made the sale remembered the woman quite well, and was sure she could recognize her again, because certain alterations were necessary, and *madame* had a peculiar mark on her left shoulder blade—a queer mark. The prefecture had forgotten the English phrase, and Winter did not understand the French one.

"*Un moment, s'il vous plait!*" he said, covering the receiver with his hand. "What in the world is *un signe croissant?*"

"It means a crescent-shaped mole," said Furneaux.

Then the chief had to enlighten Paris, and reddened under the consciousness that all ears were alert to check his explanatory French. Nevertheless, he emerged triumphantly from the ordeal.

"The dress was purchased last November," he told the others when the call was ended. "The prefecture believes that the name Jules Lefèvre is an assumed one, being that of a famous French painter, though minus the letter 'b.' A notorious German agent, named Erminia Schwartz, has a mark which corresponds with that on the shoulder of the purchaser of the dress. If ours is the same woman, Paris wants her badly. Evidently you gave them some details, Sheldon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Quite right! They offer help, and will be glad to examine a few of the pills we found on that fellow now in Bow Street. Is the analysis in yet?"

"It reached us this afternoon, but it is only a preliminary report. The Home Office laboratory regards it as a new preparation, mostly synthetic, and certain rather uncommon experimental tests must be made before the constituents can be stated accurately. They believe they already possess certain information which fits in with this case."

The commissioner rose with a smile.

"This must be the new war which every one is talking about," he said. "All that is lacking in the enemy's equipment is an airship and a few fast planes. I think we ought to endeavor to meet daily at ten and five o'clock. I want to keep in personal touch with this business."

During the next hour, Linton, a novice in all that concerned the work of the Criminal Investigation Department, was initiated into its remarkably businesslike system. He heard detectives voicing their knowledge of the international underworld—its leaders, their ways, their dupes, and their meeting places. He was astounded by some of the names mentioned—those of people whom he had regarded hitherto as amiable faddists, and by no means likely to be the associates of dangerous degenerates. The famous hotels, night clubs, and cafés which one set or another used as common ground for their attack on social order were so numerous that the mere recital took his breath away.

The telephone — often two instruments at once—was busy enough now. Instructions were given to divisional headquarters, and arrangements made to round up or shadow certain suspects, or for local detectives to accompany men from Scotland Yard to some noted rendezvous at a fixed hour, on the ground that "Maréchal and Corsini play chess there every night at nine," or "Ruby Montagu is dancing instructress there," or "the doctor seldom shows up till half past ten."

Furneaux broke in when "the doctor" was spoken of.

"That chap is no doctor, but an analytical chemist, isn't he?" he inquired.

"Yes," said the man.

He had mentioned a noted drug purveyor, whose boast was that the authorities could never bring a definite charge against him.

"Watch him closely to-night—all night, if you can keep on his track without alarming him. I know he deals only through intermediaries, but it will be useful if you can get some of the stuff he supplies. No arrest, of course."

"By the way, Sheldon, are those half crowns ready?" said Winter.

"Yes, sir. Here are seven, all marked 'No. 8.' I used counterfeit half crowns. They resemble the real thing perfectly."

This raised a laugh. Sheldon was by way of being partly Scottish, so perhaps he could not bear the defacing of genuine coins.

Linton was almost thrilled at finding a number of "tokens" distributed. He gathered that they would be produced at the proper moment if a guarantee of good faith were demanded by some cautious but nearly hoodwinked rascal. He did not receive one, from which fact he deduced that his immediate cue was to listen and say nothing.

At twenty minutes to eight Furneaux sprang up and called him from the gathering. Winter merely nodded when the little man left the room.

"I'll be with you as soon as possible," he said.

Furneaux hurried his companion into a taxi, and gave the address of an Italian restaurant in Dean Street.

"Soho is no place in which to keep a lady waiting," he explained; "but Miss Mainwaring promised not to arrive before eight, and you can spruce up a bit while I mount guard at the door."

"I'll be good, and do as I'm told," smiled Linton; "but there is one question I'm dying to put."

"Well, don't die just yet."

"What part do I play in this quest?"

"Aren't you satisfied, Linton? You have had nearly all the fat in the production thus far—that is, if you understand stage slang."

"Quite so, but I couldn't help noticing that I was completely left out of your plans at headquarters."

"For the very good reason that we have no plans. We must hook a bigger fish than Ruffini before we begin to think of laying Lefèvre by the heels. That is where you come in. You have actually seen the man and two of his friends. That is a tremendous asset. Also you have heard him speak—"

"So has Miss Mainwaring."

"You have a most annoying trick of interruption! Can't you take your mind off that girl for ten consecutive seconds? Your eyes gleamed every time the chief mentioned her. Now, not a word about Lord Robert Ferris. If she finds out that you are a friend of his, she'll be scared to death."

This tirade amused Linton, but he ignored the greater part of it.

"I don't agree with you," he said quietly. "Miss Mainwaring is not the sort of young female who goes in at the deep end about a rattlepate like Bobby Ferris; but there must be some member of the Copmanthorpe household in whom he is interested. I cannot imagine him having much in common with a solemn person like a cabinet minister."

He did not catch the scrutinizing glance Furneaux threw at him. They were crossing Trafalgar Square close to King Charles's statue, and a Victoria bus nearly collided with the taxi. Language followed, brief, lurid, and much to the point. Each driver formed a rapid and most unfavorable judgment of the other, and said so. A traffic policeman wanted to join in the discussion, but faded away at a wink from Furneaux; and there was no further talk about Lord Robert Ferris or the Copmanthorpe household.

XVI

Miss Mainwaring was delayed, though Furneaux was sure she would arrive promptly at eight. Linton, however, directed by Signor Pucci, the enormously stout proprietor of the Ristorante Milano, was washed and combed, and back at the front door of the restaurant again, before Miss Mainwaring's taxi drew up at the curb.

A tall young man alighted first, and held the door open for her.

"And, pray, whom have we here?" said Furneaux vexedly.

"Mr. Frederick Blenkey, of Ewell," murmured Linton in his ear.

"Ah, those infernal newspapers again!" growled the detective.

Of course, Fred had read of his Monica's plight, and had caught the next train to London. He was so deeply distressed that Peggy thought it advisable to bring him with her, as she did not know how much or how little to tell him. She explained this breathlessly after paying off the taxi driver.

"Monica is in good hands, and will be in the pink after a few days' rest," announced Furneaux confidently. "What are you, Blenkey?"

"I'm with my father in a small market garden, sir," came the answer.

"Would you know those two fellows again—the two who made a fuss about losing a half crown on Box Hill yesterday?"

"Know 'em? I'd know 'em better than their mothers would after I was through with them, if I got half a chance!" vowed Fred.

"Can you be spared from the market garden for a day or two, if your expenses are paid?"

"Yes, sir; but mayn't I see Monica?"

"No, you may not, until the end of the week. Report at Scotland Yard to-morrow morning at a quarter to ten, and bring a bag. Now, don't loiter here another moment, there's a good chap. There are too many sharp eyes in this neighborhood."

Fred lifted his hat, and was evidently about to bid the Hon. Peggy a respectful farewell, but Furneaux hissed:

"No names!"

So he made off, though not without a puzzled look at Linton. He could not guess that this half recognition was a point in his favor.

Furneaux hustled his guests upstairs to a room on the first floor.

"Blenkey may earn his keep," he confided to them. "Now, inspector, when the waiter comes—a fellow all white apron, bushy eyebrows, and black hair—tell him to stage three Martinis, and to have dinner ready for four in fifteen minutes. I am not ordering a cocktail for you, Miss Mainwaring, but I hope you will take a glass of Pucci's three-star Chianti. He gets it direct from Florence. Our blushing inspector will entertain you while I remove the dust of Surrey and the grime of London. Mr. Winter will be with us soon."

The two young people were left gazing at each other. Linton, being expressly forbidden to discuss the one topic in which he was most interested, essayed valiantly to avoid it.

"Our diminutive friend packs a lot into a few words," he said.

"Yes," pouted Peggy. "He says anything he wants to say himself, but tells everybody else they mustn't dare open their mouths."

This remark had such a curious aptness that Linton was hard put to it to conceal his surprise.

"Please don't do him an injustice," he said. "It was not his fault that you were carried off before luncheon to-day."

"I know that quite well," she said, unpinning a hat with a hanging veil. "That stupid person, Lord Robert Ferris, not only chases after me to Dorking, but gets me called to Scotland by to-morrow morning's train from King's Cross."

Linton was suddenly aware of a sharp pang of disappointment.

"That is too bad," was all he could find to say.

Quite unaware of what he was doing, he allowed his eyes to dwell rather fixedly on Peggy's wealth of brown hair.

"What's the matter?" she inquired anxiously. "I was horribly rushed by Fred's coming to the house at half past seven."

"I was only thinking you had brought some of the golden sunset into this stuffy room," he said. "I don't think I have ever before noticed such varying tints in the strands of a woman's hair."

Peggy reddened a little, but laughed.

"It's not peroxide, if that is what you mean," she said.

"I have always understood that the peroxide stage came somewhat late in life," he retorted.

"Just about the time a man's hair begins to fall off."

"Probably—about the period of the silver wedding, in fact."

"That seems like looking rather far ahead, doesn't it?"

"This is my first attempt to peer into the future in that respect; but please pardon the remark. I just blurted out the first words that came into my head. I suppose one's nerves relax unconsciously, though I used to pride myself on not having nerves, and have never sympathized sufficiently with fellows who suffered from shell shock. Perhaps, it is by force of contrast. After a hectic day, here am I dining with—you!"

Peggy's heart throbbed a little then. She knew full well that this good-looking inspector of police was telling her that he admired her, and was doing it with a boyish reserve immensely more effective than the outspoken compliments to which she was accustomed. She wondered how a housemaid, or lady's maid, as she was supposed to be—for Furneaux had warned her that no one in Dorking was aware of her true status—would behave in such conditions.

"Evidently you are not married," she tittered, "or you would not care what color my hair was."

"That is profoundly true," he said. "I am not married, nor likely to be for some years, if ever. May I explain that somewhat cryptic remark?"

"Why?"

"Because, if a man is not a prig, he should not pose as one."

"Oh, please tell me!"

"I have given no thought to marriage, because I am not in a position to maintain a wife."

"But, my goodness, that shouldn't stop you from trying to find the right girl!"

"It has done so—hitherto."

Peggy was profoundly thankful that an Italian waiter should enter just then, and should be dispatched for cocktails. She regained her breath during the interlude, short though it was.

"You've told me absolutely nothing about all the exciting things the evening papers have printed," she protested.

"I have not set eyes on a newspaper since seven o'clock this morning, but I shall be astonished if any journalist knows half what you know, Miss Mainwaring. However, here goes!"

He gave her a fairly comprehensive résumé of the Ruffini incident and other minor circumstances. She was immensely amused at hearing of the mole on the shoulder blade of the lady who purchased a costume in the Rue Blanche.

"Surely even Mr. Furneaux doesn't regard that as much of a clew!" she cried. "It will be splendid as a means of identification, but first you will have to catch the woman."

"And half strip her," put in the little detective himself. "Yet I admit that your sex saves a lot of trouble in that respect nowadays."

"Not when we are liable to display large moles," Peggy retorted.

"Anyhow, I see an appalling number of scraggy necks. Ah, here comes a genial ruffian who is an expert authority on such matters!"

The chief entered, smiling.

"I was half afraid you might have elected to travel north by the night train, Miss Mainwaring," he said.

"How did you hear anything about my going to Scotland?" demanded Peggy, round-eyed.

"Your butler is a much-worried man these days. Fearing he might have said too much to Lord Robert Ferris, he rang up my office, and Mr. Sheldon, in my absence, telegraphed to Lord Copmanthorpe, requesting him to permit you to remain in London. When you reach home this evening, you may find that your journey has been countermanded."

"Oh, I do hope so!" she cried delightedly. "I shall eat with a good appetite now. Indeed, I think I ought to. I missed my luncheon, and have only had a cup of tea since breakfast."

"All being well, you shall have the best dinner London can provide. Have you seen Signor Pucci?"

"The fat man?"

"Yes—he eats his own food. What a testimonial! Do you hear the stairs creaking? He is coming to tell us what he is providing for the feast. We dine here on all really great occasions, such as this, though you would never imagine it by looking at Furneaux."

"In effect," smirked Furneaux, "you can now see the vital distinction between a *gourmand* and a *gourmet*. Pucci, of course, being a professional, is *hors concours*."

Peggy took his point instantly. Her eyes danced in rapid survey of the three men.

"You and I, Mr. Linton," she said, "are between the horns of a dilemma. I take it that if we eat with a good appetite, we shall emulate Mr. Winter in size, whereas, if we are Spartan in our choice of food, we may resemble Mr. Furneaux."

"My advice is that you should follow whatever system you have adopted thus far," said Linton.

Signor Pucci came in.

"Silence now for the oracle!" commanded the chief.

His seriousness evoked a laugh. Most certainly the sinister shadow of M. Lefèvre was not permitted to cast any gloom on that merry gathering.

XVII

A MOST pleasant and excellent meal passed without the diners being disturbed by telephone or official messenger, though, to be sure, both Winter and Furneaux looked for quick results from the campaign of inquiry they had set on foot. It was still daylight at half past nine, when Linton was intrusted with the pleasant task of escorting Miss Mainwaring to Curzon Street.

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't walk?" inquired the girl.

"None whatever," said the chief. "Turn to the right, and you will be in Oxford Street in a few minutes. Mr. Furneaux and I will leave later. If you are at the Yard about half past ten, Mr. Linton, Sheldon will tell you where you lodge for the night. He is trying to secure a bed for you somewhere near the Strand."

"Why shouldn't I stay at my club?"

"What club?"

"The Rag."

"That will suit admirably."

"I'll call there on my way, and see if they have a vacant room."

Furneaux caught a meditative gleam in the Hon. Peggy's eye, but passed no comment until the two young people had left the restaurant.

"Explanations will now follow," he said then, watching Winter lighting a fresh cigar.

"And none too soon. Why should we want that poor lad to be plagued by an impossible love affair?"

"*Nom d'un nom!* Why impossible?"

"Have you forgotten that Lord Copmanthorpe is Home Secretary — a prominent member of the present government?"

"Yes, a Home Secretary with a seat in the House of Lords! One peep of snobbery out of him, one undemocratic shake of the head, and the band of Scottish brothers on the Labor benches in Parliament will rend him limb from limb!"

Winter flung away the remains of a match with a gesture that was almost impatient.

"Are we chasing rogues or running a matrimonial bureau?" he cried.

"We needn't do a thing more for Arthur and Peggy. Did you notice how they swallowed each other with every course? Arthur was saying to himself how idyllic life would be if such a girl sat opposite regularly at meal time, and she was thinking how safe she would feel in the arms of a fine, upstanding—"

"Oh, cut it out, for Heaven's sake! Let's just make sure they are all right, and then hurry to headquarters."

Neither Peggy nor her companion was aware that a taxi containing the men they had just left turned down Regent Street when they themselves crossed Oxford Circus. It was within the bounds of reasonable chance that they might have been shadowed by some human ferret prowling around Soho, so the detectives made sure— that was all. Linton, it is true, did not forget to keep his eyes about him, but it is difficult to exercise several senses at once, and Miss Peggy was occupying his mind almost exclusively at that moment.

She put him on the rack as soon as they left the restaurant.

"If you're a member of the Rag, you must have held a commission," she said.

"Yes," he agreed.

"What regiment were you in?"

"The East Kents."

Silence for a few seconds. Obviously the girl was puzzled as to the best way of phrasing the next question.

"I wasn't cashiered, or anything like that," he went on with a smile. "I had to consider the future, and the army seemed to offer a dead end after the war. There are heaps of young captains with the D. S. O., and they cannot all become generals. As a matter of fact, I couldn't see myself a colonel in twenty years, and I had a perfect horror of becoming a time-expired major; so I chose the police, in which the prospects are fair."

"Do you mean in the higher ranks?"

"Yes. My uncle, Colonel Hollies, is keeping a chief constableship warm for me, but—"

"But what?"

"I am beginning to dread the social complexities of life in England. Really, it would appear that a fellow might be happier on the land, in South Africa, or California, or western Canada."

"Why, only this morning you were saying that—"

"Yes, I admit a remarkable change in my opinions."

"What brought it about?"

"I can hardly express myself clearly— yet."

Peggy had already gained some slight experience of Linton's trick of adding a remarkably suggestive word to a sentence which might otherwise have been complete without it, thus altering its significance entirely.

"I see!" she said, after a little pause.

"I'm glad of that," he could not help commenting.

"Or I think I do. I'm only a girl, with little experience of the world, but one must be stupid indeed if one fails to realize that the pleasant old England of other days has gone, and that a rather unpleasant new England is taking its place. That isn't a sly dig at the American invasion. What I mean is that our people are unhappy, dissatisfied, disunited, ready to listen to any crank who promises them a Utopia without work. No wonder all the oak trees in our parks are dying! Oh, you needn't look at me as if the new moon had affected my wits. I, too, have been thinking hard to-day. Who wouldn't, after what has happened during the past twenty-four hours? And that is why I am sure Mr. Furneaux's theory is right. Evil thoughts can be put into the mind of the public, just as deadly germs can be introduced into its body. But—excuse plain speaking, Captain Linton—even a mere woman, or a slip of a girl, whichever you choose to consider me, might well imagine that a man like you would prefer your recent adventures in England to growing oranges in the Far West or Farthest South."

"The two occupations differ widely."

"A chief constableship is quite a well paid post, isn't it?"

"Yes, as things go."

"Yet you have suddenly grown dissatisfied with the professional outlook?"

"Yes."

"How odd!"

The Hon. Peggy was playing with fire, and she knew it, but every woman is a born salamander in some respects. She had literally compelled Linton either to tell her the literal truth—that an embryonic chief constable simply cannot marry a girl in domestic service—or to wrench the conversation into a new channel. She was well aware that he would neither do the one thing nor be willing to attempt the other, and, sad to relate, she seemed to enjoy his dilemma.

But this young man had brains, and was using them.

"I am sure you do not mean to taunt me," he said quietly. "Some day you will understand that unforeseen circumstances can arise in a man's life which he has to face candidly, if they affect his career. Indeed, I can promise now that you shall know what those circumstances are, but not until M. Lefèvre and his gang are hanged or sent to penal servitude."

Peggy flinched at that. It suddenly occurred to her that she was hardly acting quite fairly to one who had virtually told her that she was the cause of his new worries. Then she reddened to her shoulder blades as she perceived, just in the nick of time, that the avowal trembling on her lips was tantamount to saying that there was no great social disparity between a peer's daughter and a budding chief constable of an important county.

So it was she, and not Linton, who was compelled to change the subject—though, true daughter of Eve, she could not make up her mind to get rid of it altogether.

"As you are a member of the Rag, you probably know Lord Robert Ferris?" she said.

"Oh, yes. Of course, being poor, I am not in his set, and he would be vastly amused if he met me in my police sergeant's uniform; but he is not a bad chap. How came he to drag you away from Dorking to-day? Is he a close friend of some member of Lord Copmanthorpe's family?"

"He has been one of that crowd for years," she answered airily. "Poor old Hobbs, the butler—if ever you meet Mr. Hobbs you will appreciate the humor of the situation—blurted out something this morning about the terrible doings in Curzon Street and elsewhere, so Lord Robert thought it his duty to interfere."

"Where you were concerned?"

"Well, yes. He couldn't exactly grab poor Monica out of bed, could he?"

Peggy preened herself on the subtlety of that reply; but Linton was a single-minded person. She herself had started a hare, and he proceeded to course it ruthlessly.

"I would like to understand exactly why he thought fit to follow you all the way to Dorking. If he was sent by some one who had more authority than a butler, all well and good. If not, he behaved with an impudence for which he ought to be called to account."

"Oh, dear me! Didn't I tell you that Lady Copmanthorpe telegraphed most emphatically ordering me to Scotland to-morrow? I don't know even yet whether I am reprieved or not."

"You would prefer to stay?"

"Of course I would. What girl wouldn't? Existence in Mayfair can be horribly dull, I assure you, even when brightened with motor rides with the Bobby Ferrises of society."

"Still, Miss Mainwaring, I am puzzled," persisted Linton. "Did Lady Copmanthorpe literally request Ferris to pursue you and bring you home?"

"No, not exactly. I rather suspect Mr. Hobbs. But here we are at the end of Davies Street. I only have to walk a few yards now, so I must say good night. I've had an awfully jolly and exciting evening, for I never knew at what minute the Ristorante Milano might go up with a loud bang!"

"May I not come with you, and find out what has been decided as to your possible journey to-morrow?"

"And give Mr. Hobbs further ground for suspicion? Oh, no! Telephone me in the morning, before nine. I shall not leave earlier, even if I have to catch the Scotch express."

"Which is your house?"

"That Georgian one, with the curved windows."

"Well, I shall watch you until you are safe behind the closed door. Which way do you enter?"

"By the main door—after ten. Good-by! You'll be sure to telephone?"

"Not even Mr. Furneaux shall stop me!" declared Linton.

"I mean that I want to hear from you if I go away—about the present excitement, of course. You wouldn't care to write to me otherwise."

The naughty girl sped off then. She raced through a comparatively empty street, and was on the point of running up the few steps to her residence when a man seemed to spring out of nowhere in particular. He hailed her with a husky:

"Beg pardon, miss—may I have a word with you? Do you live here?"

Peggy had plenty of courage, but it took all her nerve to stand fast and say steadily:

"Yes. What is it?"

"I'd like to see the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring for a few seconds."

"Why not ring, and inquire for her?"

"I've done it twice, but I've been shooed off, an' each time a cop has grabbed me to ask my business. Here he comes again now!"

Sure enough, a burly person in plain clothes was advancing rapidly down the street. Linton, too, must be approaching from the other end, so Peggy grew confident.

"I am Miss Mainwaring," she admitted.

"Well, I've taken a chance in comin' here, an' I may be locked up for it, but that's nothing. Keep indoors, miss! Better still, get away from London. I mean well, so mum's the word! Remember, miss, I was only askin' for a job."

"I'll speak to Mr. Hobbs, if you wish," she said clearly; "but I fear it is not of much use, as this house will probably be closed early in July."

"Now, then!" came a cold official voice. "You here again? What did I tell you last time?"

The detective grabbed the man with the decisive air of one who would stand no more nonsense, but Peggy heard Linton behind her, and turned. With true feminine impulse, swayed only by intuition, she had resolved to champion the unknown.

"Please, Mr. Linton," she cried, "don't let this poor fellow be arrested. He meant no harm. He—he merely wanted me to intercede with our people in his behalf, as he is out of work."

The detective, a district man, had never heard of Linton, and certainly would not have freed his prisoner because of representations made by a stranger; but he knew the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring well by sight, it being part of his duty to memorize the faces and physique of important residents in Mayfair.

"Very well, miss," he said, before Linton could utter a word; "but I ought to warn this man that he's risking a lot in waylaying young ladies like you in the street. What's your name?" the detective added, looking sternly into the intruder's eyes.

"Robert Jenks."

"Where do you live?"

"Anywhere, an' anyhow."

"So I should think! Do you know who you've been speaking to?"

"Of course I do—Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter. She don't remember me, but she's been a good friend to my mother for the last two years."

Peggy's face had turned scarlet now. She alone could interpret accurately Linton's amazed silence. Indeed, the detective's suspicious gaze had turned on him more than once already.

She pulled herself together sufficiently to cry in astonishment:

"Are you the soldier son of Mrs. Jenks, who lives in Riverside Cottages, near the Peak?"

"Yes, miss. That's why I made bold to say what I did."

Linton had found his tongue by this time.

"There seems to be a certain indefiniteness about the identity of more than one person present," he said, and the metallic rasp in his utterance was altogether new in Peggy's ears. "What regiment did you serve in?"

"The Royal Fusiliers."

"Which battalion?"

"The fifth; but I don't see—"

"Are you Lance Corporal Jenks, of B Company?"

"Yes, sir."

The man unconsciously squared his shoulders, and surveyed his questioner with a sudden intentness.

"I recall both your face and your voice now," smiled Linton. "I suppose you have not forgotten the night on the Menin *pavé*, when you guided the relief by the sparks struck from the flints by a boche machine gun which had the range?"

"Lord love a duck! You're Captain Linton, of the East Kents!"

"Well, suppose we allow Miss Mainwaring—whose courtesy title I am not yet acquainted with—to go inside her house. Then you and I can have a chat about old times. I may be able to help, too."

"I must find another opportunity to explain matters," said Peggy, trying desperately hard to be dignified and self-possessed. "Others than you have experienced difficulties as to correct nomenclature, sergeant—I beg your pardon, I should have said inspector—or is it Captain Linton?"

Having achieved the last word, though not with convincing success, she hastened up the steps and let herself in with a latchkey. At that moment the telephone rang, and the butler appeared.

"That 'll be her ladyship, miss," he said uneasily. "Lady Copmanthorpe has called twice, and is very much upset."

Peggy had not many seconds in which to collect her wits before her mother was demanding, in the staccato accents of maternal annoyance, where she had been, and what on earth "all this" meant.

Peggy was quite firm, as every well regulated young woman nowadays has to be with one or both of her parents.

"It is quite obvious, dearest," she said calmly, "that you have worked yourself up into a state of agitation about nothing in particular. Haven't you received the telegrams I sent you?"

"Yes, but—"

"And isn't it evident that I cannot say over the public telephone what I told you I had written and posted in good time for the mail?"

"Yes, but that is not the point; and please don't begin lecturing me."

"Darling, a simple statement of fact is not a lecture."

"Peggy, what is the matter with you? Why should not your father and I be alarmed when, in the existing conditions, we call three times in two hours, and are told you are out, and that Hobbs has no idea where to get in touch with you? It is just the same with Bobby Ferris."

"Has he been out, too?"

"You know very well what I mean. He is consumed with anxiety about you."

"Have you been phoning him?"

"Really, Peggy, any one would think from your tone that it was I, and not you, who had been behaving in such an extraordinary way!"

"Mother, dear, don't we belong to the Home Secretary's family?"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Everything. I simply dare not explain, except that I have been dining with Scotland Yard officials, and that two detectives have just seen me enter our front door. I am in no danger."

"But you must be. If not, why should Scotland Yard—"

"Please, darling!"

"Well, I really don't know what to say. You may be right. Probably you are; but on no account leave the house again until I ring in the morning."

"So I am not to come to Scotland?"

"No. Dear, oh, dear! I am so worried that I haven't told you we are joining you as soon as possible—by to-morrow night's mail, in fact."

"That is splendid! So dad is able to travel?"

"Yes. At any rate, he feels he ought to be in London."

"Then wild horses shall not drag me out again before I hear from you—about breakfast time, I suppose. Good night, darling. Sleep well!"

"One thing more—I promised Bobby you would give him a call, and reassure him."

"Oh, of course, I'll do that, with great pleasure."

The sheer joy of the undertaking was manifest a few minutes later when she obtained a number at some residential mansions in St. James's Street.

"That you, Bobby?" she said.

"Hello, Peggy!" came the reply. "By Jove, it's a relief to hear your voice. Where are you speaking from?"

"Home. Will you do something to oblige me, Bobby?"

"Just try me!"

"Well, I only want you to mind your own business for the next day or two. It's a slight request. Can't you take your company for a route march, or examine the canteen accounts, or do something equally valuable and time-consuming?"

"Look here, old girl—"

"I can't. I'm tired, and rather cross. For goodness' sake stop worrying mother, who will be here on Saturday. So long!"

In effect, the Hon. Peggy's small world was in a whirl, and she was beginning to feel the strain of continually readjusting her mental poise.

While crossing the hall, she noticed a table and two easy chairs in the cloak room, and asked why certain plates and glasses were set forth. The butler explained.

"An inspector called here an hour ago, miss," he said, "and wished me to arrange some place where two men could sit all night. They will come on duty at eleven."

"Two policemen?"

"Yes, miss. It seems the house has to be guarded inside as well as out."

"What fun! Are we at war again, Hobbs?"

"Looks like it, miss. A rough-spoken sort of fellow called here twice this evening, and—"

"A man named Jenks?"

"So he said."

"Oh, he's all right. I met him outside."

The butler had to be satisfied with this cryptic remark, as his young mistress went straight to her room. She did not turn on the light, but opened a window and looked down into Curzon Street, which was somewhat more animated now, as people were coming home from late dinners or early concerts. In another hour, when the theaters closed, the thoroughfare would be busy again.

She could discern nothing unusual or out of the way in the external aspect of things. London was peaceful and decorous as ever. Yet she sat there a long time, peering into the lamp-lit vistas, though hardly seeing them, for her thoughts were with a man who, if words meant anything, had dreamed of sacrificing a career for the sake of a girl —a girl whom he had met for the first time only thirty hours earlier.

XVIII

MEANWHILE there had been a somewhat earnest discussion on the pavement. The detective, whose name was Dewar, was by no means prepared to part company with the two men who had come together so unexpectedly, while Linton had his own reasons for not wishing to declare openly what his present occupation was.

Dewar insisted so strenuously that the others should accompany the nearest policeman to the district station that his colleague had no option but to produce a warrant card, which, of course, put matters right instantly. As Linton had foreseen, however, Jenks became intractable.

"What d'ye want with me, anyhow?" came the sulky demand. "The young lady told you straight enough why I tackled her, didn't she?"

"Yes," agreed Linton. "That is not the point. As an old comrade in the field, I am ready to give you a helping hand, but we ought to talk things over first. I have half an hour to spare. Why not come and have a drink, and some supper?"

Jenks had suddenly grown furtive and restless. His eyes peered hither and thither. He seemed to expect, or fear, that something would happen.

"If you're in the police, sir," he almost whispered, "I daren't be seen with you, an' that's Gawd's own truth!"

"I won't ask you why, though your nerves must be in a poor way if you are afraid of any danger here. Now, let me persuade you. Let us take that taxi, and drive to a restaurant in the Strand. No one can possibly know we are in the car, or where we are going. Come, Jenks, pull yourself together! You didn't need telling that on the Menin Road; so, why now?"

Still unwilling, and watching the street both ways, Jenks allowed himself to be led to the vacant taxi, which had just brought four people to a neighboring house. He sighed with relief when the vehicle was in the thick of the traffic along Piccadilly.

"Well, I've gone an' done it now," he muttered, as if reasoning with himself. "Done myself in twice to-night, I have, for I couldn't bear to stand by an' see that nice young lady blown to bits without my havin' warned her. But they'll get me for this, I know, as sure as the Lord made little apples!"

"I don't agree with you. You're low-spirited and run down, or you would never believe that a gang of lunatics and criminals can work their will on the people of this country."

"What's that? What do you know about it?"

Jenks's consternation was now so overpowering that he literally trembled.

"A good deal. Don't think for a moment that high explosives and deadly drugs can be manufactured in England without the authorities becoming aware of the facts. Neither can Communistic bosh be preached only to those prepared to swallow it; but we cannot talk here. Wait till we have eaten something, and find some place where we can have a quiet smoke."

"Where are we goin'?"

"To a café in the Strand. You heard me telling the driver."

Jenks threw out his hands helplessly.

"I only hope it won't vanish off the map while we're in it," he muttered. "Well, I'm game, for all that. I haven't had a square meal for weeks, though I was promised a good supper to-night, later on."

A dozen questions suggested by those few words leaped to Linton's mind, yet he dared put one alone—the vitally important one.

"Why have you a notion that a perfectly harmless chophouse may be blown to pieces to-night?" he said, forcing a laugh.

"Because something is goin' to happen to-night, sir, though I don't know what, or when, or where. They don't tell us poor fellows much. We're to have our innings when London is half in ruins, they say."

It was an exasperating position, but Linton kept his head. He saw no good purpose to be served by deviating from his original plan. By hook or by crook, he meant to bring Jenks in touch with Winter and Furneaux as quickly as possible; but the man was manifestly so scared that he had to be handled gently, or he might break down completely.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "here we are! I'm afraid we cannot get a drink, but there will be enough to eat, and I'll find some whisky or beer elsewhere. Hello, what's up now?"

Jenks, white-lipped and terror-stricken, had shrunk behind him, as a tall, elderly, well dressed man emerged from the door of the restaurant and hired the cab they had quitted.

"Can you be at Paddington station by half past ten?" said this person to the taxi driver.

"I'll try," was the answer.

"Double fare if you do it!"

The taxi made off.

"That's one of 'em!" Jenks whispered hoarsely. "He's one who talks to us fellows. D'ye think he twigged me? If so, my number's up!"

Again Linton had to let an opportunity pass.

"Oh, come on!" he said, disregarding his companion's cowering attitude. "If we don't hurry, we shan't get a steak, and that is what you want just now more than anything else in creation!"

(*To be continued in the April number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

LET ME BE YOUR BOSWELL!

LET me be your Boswell,
And walk the world with you,
To chronicle your beauty,
Your mind so fair and true,
The graces of your nature,
The gems of thought you strew.

Sweet, in the lap of evening,
With day's brave banners furled,
Your speech is low and golden,
With ancient wisdom pearled.
Oh, let me be your Boswell,
And I will tell the world!

Olin Lyman

The Wind of Luck

IS IT TRUE OR UNTRUE THAT THE CHANCES OF LIFE ARE ALWAYS SUBJECT TO THE LAW OF AVERAGES?

By William H. Hamby

JAMISON sat on the landward side, looking out morosely over the Chinese city. Chung Yong, his China boy, who had come on board with the luggage, stood respectfully waiting his attention to say good-by to him. Burnell, a man whom Jamison had met in the interior of China several times during the past two years, leaned on the rail, smoking a long, black cigar.

The purser came on deck and announced that the ship's sailing would be delayed twenty-four hours. Most of the passengers hurried into shore boats and put off to the city, for one more day in China. Jamison only hunched himself the deeper into his steamer chair, and scowled the harder at the September sky that arched softly over a glamorous segment of that strange old land of mystery.

The deck was cleared, except for the China boy, who still waited to say good-by, and Burnell at the rail, smoking his black cigar—and, yes, a young woman who walked past Jamison, looking at him out of the tail of her eye. She stopped farther up the deck, and turned back.

She walked past Jamison again, looking at him a little more provocatively. She was an American, apparently, with an alluring face and a striking figure. The fit of her clothes and the unrestrained swing of her limbs freely displayed her physical charms; but Jamison's eyes never swerved a fraction of an inch to follow her, nor did his blood quicken by one heartbeat.

"Me go now." The China boy approached a little nearer. "Me say good-by. When you go Melica, you get Melican boy."

Jamison rubbed his neck around in his collar. A collar button had worn through the flap of his shirt, and was scratching his skin. He ran his finger under the collar, yanking it up with a disgusted grimace. Then he turned to the China boy.

"Where you going, Chung Yong—back to the mission school?"

"No—me go work for some other Melican man."

"But I thought you were a mission boy?"

"Me was. Me go to mission man and worship his God, to get him teach me English. When me no speak English, get six, seven dollar month. When me learn speak good English, then me work for you at thirty dollars month. Now me don't need worship Melican God any more."

"All right, Chung! Whatever god you worship, I hope he'll bring you better luck than mine has—if I have one. Good-by!"

The China boy gone, Burnell turned from the railing and came and sat down beside Jamison.

"Do you know why the sailing has been delayed?"

"No." Jamison was not interested in the reason. "I never ask for the pedigree of old Bad Luck."

"It's the Derby," said Burnell. "This is the big day of the races. The captain and his officers wanted a final fling at it. Suppose"—Burnell felt in his pocket for a match—"we go over and try our luck?"

Jamison laughed. It was much the sort of laugh a tramp might give if asked to contribute to a home for stray bulldogs.

"Luck!" His tone had an ironic inflection. "Try our luck! If you knew what my luck is, you wouldn't want to be present when it's tried!"

Burnell leaned back in his deck chair, his face taking the look of a man who is always seeking, but has never quite found the answer.

"Luck *is* a queer thing. In America we think of it merely as a series of accidents, some good and some bad, the good and the bad fairly well balanced. Over here it is something invisible, but personal. To the oriental, luck is some sort of impish, freakish spirit that plays diabolical tricks on him when he is doing his best, and heaps gifts in his hands when he is doing his worst. We call luck the law of average, and insist that it plays no vital part in the long run. The oriental, believing that it is outside of him, feels that he has nothing to do with it except to lay off when it is against him, and to play hard when it runs with him."

Jamison was a large man with a sensitive face, marked by many disappointments, but his eyes were still defiant. He looked around at his companion.

"I think they are nearer right than we."

Burnell shook his head, smiling skeptically at his companion's pessimism.

"The wind may blow from the east for a long time, but it always changes. Luck is only the dropping of unrelated accidents into our daily routine; and, like the fall of the dice, in a thousand throws the sum about balances. I know you feel that you have been dogged by bad luck, but—"

"Dogged? I'd say wolfed!"

"But if a man uses good judgment and is persistent—"

"Good judgment!" Jamison flared at him. "For ten years I had, as my twin gods, safety and good judgment; but luck followed along after me with a club, and knocked every venture I made in the head before it could walk. I am a surgeon—or was one. My reputation was spreading over half the continent. One evening, while sitting on my porch, reading a medical review, the rocker of my chair found the one weak board in the floor, and I fell over backward and broke my left shoulder. The joint was crushed so badly that I never fully regained the use of it."

"Lucky," said Burnell, "that it was not your right arm!"

"I operate with my left."

Burnell whistled under his breath.

"That was tough!"

"I had already earned more than a hundred thousand dollars. A week before the accident I deposited fifty thousand dollars in a trust company. With the other fifty thousand I bought half a million dollars' worth of Liberty bonds, paying ten per cent down and borrowing the rest. The trust company failed, and paid five cents on the dollar. Liberty bonds, which I bought at par, slumped to eighty-five. The bank sold out at ninety, to protect itself."

"Of course," said Burnell, "luck does seem to run in streaks."

"In streams, you mean," corrected Jamison. "Those are only three out of a hundred instances—some small, but none the less exasperating. This was one of the most ironic"—Jamison smiled cynically—"while I was in France, helping to make the world safe for democracy, my *fiancée,* the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, married the golf professional at our country club."

Burnell laughed.

"Perhaps that was foreordination rather than luck," he suggested.

"Anyway," said Jamison, relapsing into moodiness, "I think the oriental is right. Luck is something outside of you—something set to play tiddledywinks with your most serious plans." The speaker's eyes smoldered angrily. "But, damn him, he'll have to play the game clear to the end with me! I won't quit. I'm going back to America to try it again."

Burnell arose and lighted a cigar.

"Come on, let's go to the races. You've got the grumps, and need a little sport."

"Not me!" Jamison shook his head decisively, and slipped down in his chair again. "I stick on this boat until I get to America."

"Oh, come on!" urged Burnell. "Be a good fellow. I need company, and I want to go to the races."

Again Jamison shook his head stubbornly, but Burnell persisted.

"Damn it, man!" Jamison blurted at last. "I'm broke—dead broke. I've got my ticket and just ten dollars."

"No matter!" Burnell waved the objection aside. "It's my party. I've got to have company."

Jamison yielded, and went.

II

The Hongkong race course is in Happy Valley, which also contains the cricket and football fields—and the graveyard. The third race was just being called as Burnell and Jamison sauntered along the circle of betting booths. It was a perfect September day, and there was a large and variegated crowd. People of almost every nationality in the world were swirling about the betting booths, all bent on putting their luck to the test.

That is one of the fascinations of gambling. Even the prudent, hard-headed man feels that out somewhere there is something called luck. He is uncertain whether it is his friend or his foe. By buying a piece of cardboard with the name of a horse upon it, by drawing a card from a deck, or by the drop of a ball in the roulette pocket, he has a notion that he can put the thing to a test, and see whether luck is running with him or against him. If he wins, fortune is his friend, and he is more exhilarated than from a glass of wine. If he loses, and has persistency, he will go at it again and again, trying to change his luck.

Burnell stopped at the first booth and bought a five-dollar ticket on a strange horse. Jamison sauntered beside him, glum and cynical, still annoyed at having been dragged unwillingly from the ship to this most futile of all fields of chance.

At the second booth Burnell bought another ticket, and handed it to his friend.

" Here's one. Try your luck with this."

" I don't want it." Jamison shook his head. " I am not a gambler. I have played the game a little, here and there, but it isn't in my line, and I have no intention of giving up five dollars of my last ten to pay for this thing."

" I don't expect you to. Take it. If you win, you can pay me, and if you don't—"

Jamison took it grudgingly, stuck it in his vest pocket, and turned to watch the race.

" There!" Burnell turned to Jamison when the winners were posted. " I told you your luck would soon change. Your horse has won. Your ticket pays eighteen dollars!"

In spite of himself, Jamison felt a thrill —his first happy stir for many months. Eighteen dollars is a good deal of money to a man who has only ten. Could this be a friendly nudge from the spirit of luck?

He collected his winnings, and took out five dollars to bet on another horse. He looked at the list posted for the next race. There was only one name on it of which he had ever heard—Standard Oil. Stopping at the first booth, he threw down a five-dollar bill and asked for a ticket on Standard Oil. The Chink gave him a piece of cardboard, which Jamison stuck in his pocket and walked away.

" Are you betting on this race?" Burnell asked.

" Yes—I paid five dollars for a ticket on Standard Oil."

Jamison took it out, to look at it for the first time.

" Why, that isn't Standard Oil!" exclaimed Burnell. " That's Punjab."

A man may carry a weight of trouble, disappointment, and bad luck for months and months, and bear up under it with a grim sort of humor. Then there comes some trivial irritation, like the scratching of a collar button, or this blunder over a five-dollar ticket, and his anger breaks out like an eruptive volcano. Jamison was mad—thoroughly, raspingly mad. This was the one fling too much from bad luck, and it was the Chinaman's fault.

He walked swiftly back to the booth, threw down the ticket, and demanded one on Standard Oil. The Chinaman could not speak English, nor could he make Jamison understand Chinese. The more Jamison swore, the more futilely the Chinaman chattered. Jamison's temper snapped. He reached over the board counter, grabbed the man by the cue, and yanked him out of the booth.

The Chinaman's squawks brought a sergeant of police—a raw Scotsman—who demanded to know what it was all about.

" This damned Chinaman," said Jamison, " gave me a ticket on the wrong horse. I asked for Standard Oil, and he's given me Punjab."

" Sir," said the policeman dourly, " if you had taken the trouble to look, you would have seen that there is a separate booth for each horse. This is for Punjab." He pointed to a spot above the door where, plainly posted, was the name of the horse. " Only tickets on Punjab are sold here. You have bought one, and it cannot be exchanged."

Few times in his life had Jamison been so thoroughly angry with the whole universe as he was when he returned to his friend at the race track fence. The next race had already begun, and the horses were sweeping down the field. For once the crowd was still. There was no shouting, no one was cheering his favorite. The whole mob of bettors seemed stunned and awed. They were looking across the track with a blank stare, as if watching some natural phenomenon, like a cyclone or breaking dam.

Jamison looked. One horse was more than two hundred yards ahead of all the rest.

"It's that wild Siberian pony," said Burnell. "No one ever heard of him before. They say he killed his stable boy this morning. I didn't know he was to run."

"What's his name?" Jamison asked, still angry.

"Punjab," Burnell told him.

"Punjab?" Jamison wheeled on his friend, and fairly snatched the glasses from Burnell's hand. He read the number on the flying pony, and then consulted his program. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said reverently.

"I'll give you a hundred and fifty dollars for that ticket," offered Burnell.

Jamison shook his head.

"No—I'll see him through now."

The man at the board was posting the winners, and the rate they paid. For No. 4, which was Punjab, he wrote the figures "124."

"There!" said Burnell, laughing again. "You would have been better off to have taken my offer of a hundred and fifty."

But just then the man reached up and added another figure. The five-dollar ticket on Punjab paid twelve hundred and forty-six dollars.

Nothing shoves a man into the spotlight of admiration more quickly than a bunch of luck. Jamison was the hero of the day. He held the only ticket on Punjab, and had won the largest odds of the races. The judges invited him into the grand stand. He was applauded and smiled at and envied. Ah, but all the world loves a man who has luck!

As they returned through the city, Jamison said to Burnell:

"I am going to get my China boy and take him as far as Shanghai with me. The poor little devil felt all cut up at leaving me this morning."

They went to Chung Yong's home. Chung had left the place, his father said, two hours ago, for a long journey with an Englishman.

"I'm darned sorry for that," Jamison remarked, as they set off for the ship. "I like the little devil."

As they approached the wharf, Jamison exclaimed:

"Why, there is Chung Yong!" He called to the China boy, who was sitting on the edge of the dock. Chung jumped up, and came running, with delight in his round face.

"Chung, I thought you were gone."

Chung shook his head.

"Me was, but him no like me."

Jamison was surprised, for Chung was the best servant he ever saw.

"Why not?" he asked.

"We start to boat," explained Chung. "I carry bag. A Chinaman run from policeman, knock me down, and spillee bag." He spread out his hands to indicate that the contents went all over the street. "He"—referring to his new employer—"give me dollah and kick, and tell me go hellee."

Jamison laughed.

"Well, that is luck for me. Come on, I want you to go to Shanghai with me."

III

Word of Jamison's phenomenal winning at the races got about on the boat, and he attracted more attention on deck and in the dining saloons than many an international celebrity.

The next morning, after the boat sailed, he was in a steamer chair, with a rug about his legs, smoking one of the dozen good cigars that had been offered him during his first day out. The girl who had shown herself interestingly to him on his first morning at Hongkong came along, gave him a look of recognition, and slipped down into the chair beside him. It was not her chair, but she had the air of a privileged person. She crossed her legs, showing a very trim ankle and an expensive low shoe.

"I hear you made a killing at the races."

Her voice was rich and pleasant, and her eyes were warmly admiring. Jamison laughed. His spirits had entirely changed since returning to the boat. He felt exhilarated and adventurous.

"I have seen places on the great desert where a black tin would attract attention for ten miles. This little streak of luck of mine is like that."

"I should judge"—she was looking at him quite frankly—"that you are a very lucky man."

"Then I judge," he replied, "that you know nothing of either men or luck, for if ever there was a fellow born under a whole constellation of unlucky stars, and never able to get out from under them, I am that fellow!"

She leaned forward and laid her hand on his arm.

"There he comes," she said, glancing along the deck.

"Who is he?"

Jamison's eyes took in a huge Russian with a terrific black beard.

"Duke Nicola." Her tone was a bit awed. "They say that he got out with a sack full of gold, and that he has it with him."

The big Russian stalked grandly down the deck. His ignominious flight from the Bolsheviki and the wreck of his country had not interfered with his bearing. To himself, at least, he was still a great duke.

As he passed, his roving eye took in the girl, including her trim ankle and dainty low shoe.

"The old chap has quite an eye for beauty," Jamison remarked.

"Thanks," said the girl. "Are you going back to America?"

"Yes. Are you?"

She nodded.

"It was only a wild freak that brought me over to China. It was the most accidental sort of thing in the world, and"—she shrugged—"I haven't had a particularly good time."

Jamison saw that she was heading pretty directly for that twelve hundred dollars. He conveniently remembered that he had to go down to write some letters.

It was fifty-two hours up to Shanghai, and when the ship anchored in the bay, fifteen miles below the city, boats immediately swarmed about her, ready to take passengers up the river.

"Are you going up?"

Burnell had joined Jamison at the rail.

"Yes," replied Jamison. He was smoking a cigarette. He took it from his mouth, and blew a cloud of smoke into the wind. "You know, if I were sensible, I'd keep that twelve hundred until I got back to America. It would come in very handy; but I'm not going to do that."

"What *are* you going to do with it?"

"I'm going up to Shanghai"—Jamison smiled sardonically—"to give my luck another turn."

In Shanghai, Jamison engaged a room at the Victoria Hotel, and asked the clerk where he could find the best gambling place in the city. The clerk strongly recommended the Blue Moon, and Jamison decided to go there about dark.

Two men standing by the desk, talking, accidentally mentioned Jim Denton. Jamison knew Jim Denton. In fact, he had once saved him from execution by the Chinese government.

"Where is Denton?" he asked, turning to the man who had mentioned Jim's name.

"Managing a road house up the Bubbling Well Road," replied the stranger. "It is owned by a couple of wealthy Chinks, but Denton gets a percentage, and I fancy he isn't especially hard up."

"What's the name of his road house?" Jamison inquired.

"The California," replied the stranger. "It's a high-class sporting place."

Jamison called his China boy, went out into the street, got into a brougham, and ordered the driver to go up the Bubbling Well Road to the California. It was dusk as the brougham drew up in front of the road house.

"Chung Yong," Jamison asked, "should I gamble to-night?"

"You workee hard, and bloke allee same. Maybe you have leetle fun, and he bling good luck."

Jamison laughed.

"We'll try it, anyway."

He got a table out on the veranda, and ordered dinner. Chinese lanterns of many colors hung overhead, the September wind came soft, and the food was good.

He sat toying with a cigarette after the meal was finished. Inside was the large gambling room. They played nothing but roulette. The wheel whirled and the ball spun. The circle of men and women whose money was on the squares stood motionless, breathless, waiting for the ball to drop.

Jamison watched through the open door. There were wheels enough to accommodate all players. The stakes were often heavy. The stranger was right—it was a high-class sporting place. All the patrons were well dressed and well behaved. It was an orderly place for eating, drinking, and gambling; but gambling was the chief interest.

He had not seen Jim Denton. After saving a man's head, one is reticent about thrusting himself forward as if to claim gratitude. He and Jim had not been friends, but mere casual acquaintances.

Denton, coming out on the veranda with a cigar in his mouth, for a breath of air, saw Jamison.

"Why, hello, doc!"

He came to the table and gave him the casual greeting that wanderers exchange whose paths cross at long intervals. Denton sat down, and the two men smoked a cigar together.

" Glad you're not a gambling man, doc—at least, not to-night."

" Why not?"

Denton took the cigar from his mouth, and looked at it between thumb and forefinger, and said in a lower voice:

" We are going to have a flat wheel to-night." That, in the vernacular, meant that they were going to fix one of the roulette wheels. " Some rich Russians are due to leave part of their wad behind them to-night."

" Who are they?" asked Jamison.

" Duke Nicola is the bellwether."

" But, Denton," said Jamison, " I came up here on purpose to have a little sport to-night."

" All right!" Denton nodded. " We are willing to take a good man's money, as well as a duke's."

He rose and walked to the door. After looking over the room he returned.

" Doc, play at the table in the corner, and you'll get a fair run for your money."

" Thanks!"

IV

JAMISON smoked one more cigar. It was pure self-restraint—the holding back of a tremendous desire that was soon to be gratified. He felt almost as if he was physically pulled into the gambling room; and yet he dreaded to put it to the test.

This little streak of luck, the past two days, had lifted a gloom that had oppressed him for years. It had restored his perspective. If he went in and lost, that fatalistic feeling of being marked for disaster would return.

The room was filling rapidly. The circles about the wheels closed up until there were no gaps, and then thickened until the players were two or three deep.

There was a stir. The Russian duke had entered, with a dozen or more in his party—men and women. The wheel in the center of the room was given to them.

Jamison rose, and passed in through the door. He could not longer withhold the test of his luck.

The circle around the wheel in the corner had thinned. The players had gravitated to the center of the room, to watch the Russians. Jamison went to the corner wheel and got a place at the side, where he could easily command the whole table.

He put five dollars on the red. The wheel spun. The ball rolled around and around. The wheel slowed. His heart beat suffocatingly. The ball dropped into the red pocket. He had won!

Jamison could have leaped on the table. He wanted to shout. He might lose a dozen times now—no matter, luck was with him, and he knew he would win.

He played five of the ten on a line between eleven and twelve. Twelve came. He had won seventy-five dollars.

He played deliberately, as if thinking, but with confidence, as if he knew the probable result.

For the first five plays he won every turn. Then he lost twice, and again the winning streak came back.

He played ten dollars on No. 11. The number came, and he took three hundred and fifty dollars in bills.

On the table in the center of the room the Russians were playing heavily, but the flat wheel was getting the gold. The operator allowed them to win on small bets; then, when they doubled up, he raked in the coin.

The word passed that a man at the corner wheel was having a great streak of luck. Some one from the boat recognized Jamison as the man who had made the big winning at the races at Hongkong.

" Let's watch him," the passenger said. " He's the luckiest man in China!"

The bystanders gravitated from the Russians to the corner table. Jamison won and won. The pile of chips before him grew into stacks and cords. Time after time he cashed in hundreds of dollars' worth.

He increased his bets to the limit. The operator, losing steadily, raised the limit from twenty to fifty dollars; but instead of breaking Jamison's luck, the raise only multiplied his winnings.

Four times the dealer sent to Denton for more money. At midnight he sent for Denton, and consulted him about raising the limit again.

" The lid is off!" Denton nodded across the table to Jamison. " If you can break us, go to it!"

They had brought Jamison a high stool, so that he could sit and play comfortably. He was playing a hundred dollars at a turn now, often on different places, but never against himself. If he played twelve to win, he never played twenty-one at the same time, but played on the field that included twelve.

At one o'clock he ordered food, and ate with one hand while he played with the other. His pockets were stuffed with bills and gold. The table before him was solid with tall stacks of chips. His spirits were bubbling. He jested with the dealer and laughed with the crowd. He ordered champagne for everybody. He began drinking himself; but still the winning streak lasted. Every spectator, and, most of all, the dealer, expected at every turn that his luck would desert him, and his winnings begin to melt away.

At three o'clock he bet a hundred dollars on the red, and lost. He bet four times and lost.

"Now, my lad," said the dealer, "we'll see how long you can last!"

Jamison laughed, and laid a hundred dollars on No. 34.

The wheel spun. The ball dropped into No. 34, and the crowd gasped as he raked in thirty-five hundred dollars.

At four o'clock Jamison noticed that the board looked blurred. He had to concentrate, in order to see the numbers. He dimly perceived that he was getting drunk. Some glimmer of caution stirred. Soon he would be hopelessly drunk. He must get away.

He shoved his chips across the bar with both hands. His head cleared enough to watch the counting of the money as it was stacked before him. He stuffed it into the remaining pockets not yet overflowing, and started staggeringly to the door.

He realized that his feet were not working right. As he stepped out into the dark, he stumbled. Dimly it passed through his mind:

"This is what the damned luck has meant for me—to get me rich and drunk, and then have me knocked on the head and robbed!"

Five hundred people knew that he was leaving the place alone, with loads of money. Of course, among the number there were plenty who had more than once knocked a man on the head, or stabbed him in the back, for what was in his pockets.

He stumbled on the top step, turned to right himself, fell all the way down, and rolled for what seemed a long way. Then he lay all in a heap, just conscious enough to know what was happening.

A man approached, felt in his pockets, took something out, then reached down and caught him by the neck.

He had no power to resist. He said, or tried to say:

"Good night, luck!"

V

The next Jamison knew, he was sitting up in bed. The sun was coming in through the window. His head cleared swiftly. He was in a room—a nice room. Something was sitting there with its back to the door, and with a gun in its hand. It was Chung Yong, his China boy, fast asleep, holding Jamison's own gun.

Jamison felt something beside him — a bulge under his pillow. He dug it out. It was a sack, not of feathers, but full of bills, bills!

It all came back. They had not killed him or robbed him. It was Chung Yong who had come to him in the dark. Chung, whom he paid thirty Mexican dollars a month, had sat out there on the steps at the gambling house until four o'clock in the morning. It was Chung who had felt in his pocket—for that gun—got him into the brougham, and, with the gun ready for action, had guarded him to his hotel and to bed. Then the lad had sat with his back against the door, and with the gun in his hand, until sleep overcame him.

The ship sailed at seven o'clock that evening. At half past seven, bathed, carefully dressed, and showing no signs of his hectic night in Shanghai, Jamison went down the stairs to the dining saloon.

A girl stood waiting at the first landing, looking up at him. It was the girl whom he had encountered twice before, and in evening dress she looked more alluring than ever. He smiled and nodded. She took his arm, and they went down the remaining stairs.

Everybody in the room turned to look as they entered; and Jamison knew that the story of his winnings had preceded him. The girl, he found, had had her seat changed to beside him. As he unfolded his napkin, she rested her elbow on the table and turned to him.

"Tell me about it."

The frank admiration of her eyes and the warmth of her full lips stirred him.

"I just found a little luck," he said. "I don't know why, but it seemed that I couldn't lose."

"I said you were lucky," she nodded.

"I am, to have you for dinner companion," he returned gallantly.

She passed this without notice.

"There is a man at the table to the right," she said, without looking around. "He'll want to play poker with you. Let him alone!"

She spoke under her breath.

"Why? Is he luckier than I?"

"He is crooked as the devil."

"How do you know?"

"He used to be my husband," she replied, without hesitation.

"Then he was mighty lucky once," Jamison remarked.

"No—that was the one game in which he could not use a stacked deck. He lost!"

"All right!" smiled Jamison. "If you would rather not have me play with your ex-husband, I'll play with your future one, if you will point him out."

"Why not with me?" she asked, looking at him provocatively.

"Do you play poker?"

She nodded.

"A little."

"All right! When do we start?"

"I'll let you know." The cocktails had come, and she picked up a fork. "It will have to be arranged."

But as Jamison arose from the table, a steward approached him.

"The duke wants to meet you, sir."

Jamison went across the room, to be greeted heartily by the big Russian and introduced to his party. Twenty minutes later he was in the duke's suite, playing baccarat, a game he scarcely knew.

Nicola was a fiend at gambling. He wanted to play night and day. He had food brought to his cabin, to avoid the delay of going to meals.

The cards ran strong for Jamison. By the time the boat reached Honolulu, he had ten thousand dollars' worth of Russian gold.

The girl was waiting for him when he came on deck to go ashore. She had been waiting for him for days, but she had only caught an occasional glimpse of him between games with the duke.

"Hello!" Jamison nodded and smiled. He saw the girl was bent on vamping him, and he was not loath. "We haven't had that game of poker yet," he reminded her.

"No." A flicker of displeasure crossed her eyes, but in a moment they were caressing and beckoning again. "That can wait. You've had enough gambling for a while. How much did you lose?"

"Ask the duke," he answered. "Come on! Are you going ashore?"

It was one of the lovely evenings of Hawaii, when the moon shimmered over the palms and glinted on the low, warm swells that broke on the beach. He and the girl were standing together, looking out at the sea. Her shoulder touched his side. She leaned a little toward him. He put his arm about her, and she nestled closer.

She turned in a moment.

"I have a friend who lives here. He has a quaint house over that way." She pointed to the western part of the city. "Let's call there."

She laughed. He thought he understood her laugh, but he was not quite sure.

They had not gone a hundred yards when one of the ship's officers came hurrying after him.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jamison, but you are a doctor, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"One of our men was hurt a few moments ago. Can you come with me?"

Jamison went. He did not see the girl again until they were back on deck, and the ship was pulling up anchor.

"We must have that game of poker," he said to her, a trifle apologetically.

It looked as if he had been dodging her, and a man always feels instinctively guilty when he evades an attractive woman.

She made up the party—another woman and three men, whom she introduced to Jamison as friends of hers. He knew he was in a fixed game, but he did not care. His luck had been running so strong that he felt he could bet on it even when the cards were marked against him.

For three days they played along with small stakes, and the breaks were almost even. Jamison had seen no sign of a crooked deal, but he knew it was coming.

On the fourth evening—he had decided that this would be the last time he would play—one of the men suggested raising the ante from one dollar to five.

"Do you mind?" he asked Jamison, who sat at the end of the table, with the girl at his right.

"Make the Milky Way the limit, as far as I am concerned," responded Jamison.

"Suits me," said the spokesman. "It's a straight jack pot, with no limit."

He dealt. Evidently he dealt himself a good hand, for he won. He won three more pots after that.

Jamison got a series of poor hands, but at last somebody dealt him three nines, and he drew a fourth. He fancied that the aggressive fellow had been bluffing, and stayed with him up to a thousand dollars. At the show-down, the fellow had four kings.

The betting got stronger and stronger. Jamison had lost about fourteen hundred dollars. He pretended a nervous recklessness which he did not actually feel. Inside, he was smilingly watching for the fellow to spring his big trick.

For four deals no one was able to open, and the jack pot was sweetened ten dollars each round.

Then the aggressive one got an opening hand, and opened for a hundred dollars. Five of them stayed. The girl dropped out.

Jamison had one ace. He drew four cards. The aggressive one stood pat.

When Jamison looked at his draw, he could not believe his eyes for a moment. After one more glance, to make sure he was not mistaken, he turned his cards down, and sat waiting for the opener to bet.

The opener made it five hundred to start. The next man stayed, and Jamison raised it a thousand.

The aggressive one kicked that another thousand. All the rest were out.

These two sat looking across the table, alternately tossing two thousand dollars in bills upon it, until the jack pot looked like the window of a bank that is trying to forestall a run.

Jamison felt something tapping his foot softly. Glancing out of the corner of his eye, he saw that the girl was trying to signal to him to quit.

When there was twenty-four thousand dollars on the table, Jamison called. The aggressive one threw down four queens. Jamison displayed five aces. He had caught three aces and the joker on a four-card draw.

"Hell!" said the heavy loser, rising from the table. "I can't play against luck like that!"

VI

The game broke up. Jamison gathered the sheaves of bills, and went up on deck. It was not yet midnight, and he was not sleepy. He leaned over the rail and watched the wake of white spume in the moonlight.

A step so light that he scarcely heard it, a breath of faint perfume, the touch of an arm against his shoulder—the girl was leaning on the rail beside him.

"Doesn't luck like yours scare you?" she asked, looking into the dark green water below.

"Not this kind. It was the losing sort I had for seven years that scared me."

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"What—the luck or the money?"

"Both."

"Carry it around," he answered, "as long as it lasts."

"You don't mean that you carry all that money around on your person?"

"I surely do," he laughed. "I shall get all my winnings changed into five-hundred-dollar bills, and carry them in my pockets, ready for an emergency. Believe me, when luck gives me a shove these days, I don't hold back!"

"Luck," she said slowly, "soon gets tired of playing with a fool."

"You think I am a fool?" he inquired.

"I don't know, but I know *I* am."

"Why?"

He turned to look at her. She was very near, and her lips were very alluring.

"I can't tell you, but I know I've lost."

She left him abruptly, and went below.

He did not see her again until the ship landed at San Francisco, the next day. He was standing at the head of the gangplank as she came by. She nodded, and, as she passed, she slipped something into his side pocket. He put in his hand and brought out a card, on which was penciled the address of an exceedingly expensive resort—one of the several spots in San Francisco to which Volstead is a stranger.

Jamison grinned.

"She's still after me!"

The boat landed in the morning. At two o'clock Jamison was out at the races. He bet on six races, and won five of the six bets.

In his room at the St. Francis, as he dressed for dinner that evening, he laid out his money on the bed and counted the bills. Three weeks ago, he had sat on the deck of the steamer, broke. To-night he counted a hundred and ten thousand dollars in American money.

He stowed sheaves of bills in various pockets. He was a fool, a double-dyed fool to carry that money—he knew it; but playing safe, he had lost, and playing reckless, he had won. He felt it might be a slur on the invisible luck that had pushed him into this, if he played safe now.

He dressed and went to the number written on the card.

It was a rich dining room, with booths, and jazz, and smoke. There was a cabaret —a good one; and the last dancer, who came out amid a huzza of welcome, was—the girl of the ship.

She saw him at the table, and threw him a kiss before she began to dance.

After her turn, she came to him. He moved to a booth and ordered more drinks. Her eyes were bright; her face was flushed; she leaned close to him; her head was on his shoulder.

He ordered more drinks; and then came oblivion.

When he came to, it took him some time to orient himself. He was in a room, but where?

Bit by bit the furniture grew familiar. It was his room at the St. Francis. Then last night came back to him with a rush—the girl, the booth, the drinks.

He sprang out of bed, grabbed his clothes, which hung on a chair, and thrust his hands into pocket after pocket.

All empty!

He sank down on the edge of the bed, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hand, and went back over it all. The whole hectic three weeks — a hundred and ten thousand dollars all his—and then gone!

He sighed, shook his shoulders, got up, and took a cold bath.

After he had dressed, he went through his pockets again. There was just one dime left.

He packed his grip. He would have to explain at the desk about his hotel bill. He wondered if they would have him arrested under the law posted so conspicuously in hotel rooms.

As his hand was on the knob, there was a knock, and he opened the door.

He caught his breath in astonishment. It was the girl!

" Hello!" she said, with some concern. " Got a headache after last night?"

" No." He smiled sardonically. " I haven't even a headache left."

She handed him a small book. He took it curiously. It had the name of a bank on the back. He opened it. At the top of the first page there was a deposit memorandum in favor of Bart Jamison—$110,376.40.

" You were so drunk," she said apologetically, " that I was afraid to leave that money on you. I hope you won't be cross about it!"

They were married that afternoon, and now they have a large and prosperous orange ranch—also a good-sized and exceedingly handsome and happy family. Jamison is vice-president and the largest stockholder of a big trust company, and makes very good speeches on the advantages of thrift and safety.

CHAINS OF THOUGHT

Chains of thought—they free or bind
According to the maker's mind.
If open, like a meadow starred
  With daisy and with buttercup,
  Garlands are formed whose links cheer up
The down at heart, yet melt the hard.
Buttercups warm, and few the mazes
That are not solved by oxeye daisies.

Chains of thought—they lift or weigh
According to their interplay.
If they be riveted to cell
  Rusty and foul with sunless damp,
  They drag and gall; but if a lamp
Whose flame no dream light may excel
Hangs like an altar lantern from them,
Death has no files to overcome them.

Richard Butler Glaenzer

A Desperate Doll

THE STORY OF A WIFE WHO WANTED ALWAYS TO BE HER HUSBAND'S BABY CHERUB

By Gladys Hall

IN the beginning he told her that he liked her because she was "a baby—a doll." He confided to her that when he was a little boy he had always secretly wanted to play with dolls, but had never dared to say so because of what the other fellows would say—because, too, of what his father would say.

His father was "a man's man." His father had held verbosely that a regular boy, the kind of a boy he hoped his son would be, was the chap who played baseball and football, and smashed any other chap's nose if a fight arose. So Hugh had never played with dolls; but when he became a man—

"I still like to play with dolls," he had said, laughing; "and now I can. Now it's different. That's why I love you!"

She knew that was why he loved her. Of course, he told her other and more profound reasons; but she knew instinctively that he loved her because she was a doll. She was very young, very fragile, glazed over with innocence, very fair, and glistening gently.

Once or twice the thought came to her, back in their beginning:

"But suppose I change! Suppose I'm not a doll any more!"

Then nightmare pictures would march before her mind's eye. She thought of women she had met, women she had seen, women she had heretofore been unaware of knowing or seeing, who had waited for her to know them until now. They were women with sagging stomachs and hanging breasts, women with faded hair, women with old hands and double chins, women without laughter. She might grow to be like one of them—like all of them; and then Hugh wouldn't love her any more. She knew that!

She wasn't very deep. She didn't read a lot of books, or care about highbrow talk. Of course, being a doll, a very young doll, she hadn't needed to know these things. When she was with people who talked of deep topics, she could always laugh.

She had a darling laugh, like the glint of bird wings in the morning. When she laughed, every one smiled at her and with her; and then they, these others who were talking, were somehow made to feel rather silly and garrulous and subtly unimportant themselves. Of course, all the while it was really she, Lilla, who was unimportant; only they didn't know it.

She knew that she was unimportant. Deep down—that is, as deep down as Lilla went—she knew that she was unimportant, as people go. She couldn't do anything but be a doll. Just at first—at first after Hugh came—it didn't worry her. She was glad of it, when she thought about it at all. She was especially glad of it because Hugh loved her for just what she was—for the appealing unimportance of her, which was so very important to him.

But later on—if she should have children—if she should grow flabby and creasy and fat—

Hugh was terribly attractive to women—or so Lilla thought. He wasn't especially good-looking, either. He was no Greek god, as he sometimes very pleasantly said of himself. But the thing was, Hugh didn't need to be good-looking. He had that indescribable something called charm.

He had a touch of courtliness. He made every woman he happened to be speaking to at the moment believe that she was the one desirable woman in the world. Hugh said lovely little things to you, with his eyes, and with the gestures of his hands. Women followed Hugh with their eyes.

Hugh wasn't particularly deep, either. He didn't care much about books and psychology and that sort of thing. He said that modern women made him sick. He loved his little doll, his baby. He loved youth, and young things.

"She's a perfect little doll!" people said to Hugh, of Lilla, and then his whole face would light with tenderness.

He babied her fearfully. He kissed her tiny feet and her pink finger tips. He bought her lollipops, and laughed in adoration to see her suck them with her pursed pink lips.

She had a tiny lisp, and Hugh said that he would like to kiss each separate little word she said. He was a born lover. He would always have to have some baby girl to make love to.

On her honeymoon, Lilla wore pink and frilly things, with little bows and rosebuds of French blue.

"What, a *bride?* Why, you're nothing but a *baby!*" people would say.

Then she would pout and say to Hugh: "But I'm your grown up wife, Hugh, aren't I?"

It sounds as if she was detestably silly; but it isn't fair to say that, because she was made so.

It must have been on their honeymoon that Lilla determined always to be a baby to Hugh. No matter how little depth she had, her silky instinct told her that to hold Hugh was to bind him with ribbons of pink and blue.

II

After their honeymoon they bought a new little house in a new little suburb, and began to play at housekeeping.

Lilla was rather a nice little housekeeper. She liked things nice herself, and she kept them so. Besides, Hugh was able to provide her with an adequate maid, so that all Lilla really had to do was to lie in bed in the mornings in an adorable wrapper and cap, all fluffy and beribboned, and lisp to the maid what "Mr. Duncan would like for dinner."

They had a good time. People took them up right away. Hugh and Lilla were an attractive addition to any young community. All the women wanted to meet Hugh, and all the men wanted to meet Lilla.

The first year was sufficient unto itself. Hugh didn't get tired of babying his baby. He spent half of his day thinking up cunning little surprises for his cunning little thing. Of course, he didn't know that the cunning little thing was spending all her time doing the same thing for him in her different way. Nor did the cunning little thing suspect it of herself, at first.

Hugh wanted her to be a baby and a doll. Hugh loved young, frilly things. She loved Hugh. That was all there was in it—all there was in life.

If Hugh should ever cease to love her—if there should ever be "another woman," like some of the horrid stories you were always reading in the newspapers and the magazines—but even the first year it didn't do to think of that. It made a little blue line come around her soft rose mouth, like thin, cruel fingers pinching it. That wouldn't do at all. She couldn't have blue lines around her mouth, or anywhere else on her face.

With some women it was different, and didn't matter. There was Miss Tillotson, for instance, who lived in the corner house. She kept house for her two brothers, and wrote articles for women's magazines in between whiles.

It was different with her. She had lines—quite a few of them. She was big-breasted and wide-hipped; but when she talked, she opened up new worlds to you, and you liked the lines and crinkles, because they were Miss Tillotson, and because you wouldn't want her any different.

She had kind hands, too, with wide palms and broad, capable fingers. She knew marvelous remedies for colds. When Lilla had a sick headache, she wanted Miss Tillotson.

Lilla couldn't open up new worlds to Hugh when she talked. She really knew nothing, except how to dance with Hugh like a bit of thistledown, and how to buy fetching frocks that would make him want to take her on his knee and dandle her there an evening through.

The worst of it was that she didn't want to do anything else. Other people made her yawn and yawn, if Hugh wasn't there.

Lilla wasn't light, really. She loved Hugh too exclusively. She loved him with a passion like a sort of bisque, which caught and hardened about her heart, shutting out the world—all but the world of dolls. So long as she could remain there, she was safe; and of course she must remain there. She *must!*

There was Florence Howe, for instance.

Florence's husband had been mad about her when he married her. Every one talked about it, and said there had never been such a "case." Then, after Florence's baby was born, Florence had changed. She had never been quite herself again. She had lost most of her hair and some of her figure. She hadn't cared to go out much. Whenever they did go to a party, Florence could be seen nudging Kimball and asking him if he didn't think they had better "run along." Baby had been fretful all day, or the new nursemaid had acted strangely just before they left.

One night Kimball had told her to run along herself—he was going to stay. A little later, with her own eyes, Lilla had seen him kissing and hugging the Temple girl, in the grocery closet!

Supposing it had been Hugh! Supposing she had seen Hugh kissing and hugging some younger, prettier, cunninger girl! What would she do? What would become of her pretty playhouse world?

That night she told Hugh about Kimball Howe.

"If you ever did a thing like that!" she wailed.

Hugh kissed her.

"Why should I, lollipop?"

III

When they had been married for two and a half years, Lilla discovered that she was going to have a baby. For days she was nearly desperate with fear and premonitory terrors. Her pretty figure! Her fragile face! Her soft, massy hair! What would become of her?

She would have to do something. But what did one do? She would *have* to!

How could she be a baby, with a real baby in the house? How could she cuddle and coo with Hugh, if a real baby was with them, demanding to be cuddled and cooed over?

She told Hugh about it. Of course, she had to tell Hugh about it. She came to him, twisting her film of handkerchief and hanging her head and catching her breath in little sorrowful intakes, like some naughty child about to confess a misdemeanor. She managed to get it out in wispy gasps.

Hugh was wonderful. He saved the situation. He caught her to him and cuddled her as he hadn't cuddled her since their honeymoon, so tenderly!

He called her the sweetest baby cherub in the world. He said he couldn't imagine anything more blissful than to have two little cherubs all his own, two babies playing at being mother and child. He told her that she would be adorable, and that the only trouble was that he would frequently mistake one for the other. He said that a girl with a baby was food for angels' thoughts.

Lilla felt better. Some of the sick terror faded away. If that was the way she would appear to him—as a pink cherub fondling another pink cherub — all might yet be well. Anyhow, what could she do about it?

After all, she didn't need to be like Florence Howe. Florence had had strange ideas. She was always talking about walking so many miles each day, so that baby would have a strong constitution, or saying that she looked at beautiful pictures, so that baby would have beautiful thoughts, or discussing prenatal diets with a sort of rapt solemnity and efficiency. She always seemed to be thinking about "baby," never about herself.

Lilla needn't be like that. Lilla could think of herself. She could rest most of the time, and wear languid, fluffy things. She could sew on absurd trifles, prick her fingers, and pout and cry a little. She could be wistfully brave and gay, like a child with a cut finger, valiantly smiling over its hurt.

It wasn't as easy as she had thought, however. After the first few weeks she felt wretchedly ill and horrid. If she could have done just what she felt like doing, she would have left her hair messy and straight, and would have lain in bed and suffered; but of course she couldn't do that.

There was Hugh. She couldn't look a fright, and know that Hugh was going daily to his office, where that pretty, dark Miss Gardiner worked with such a swinging spontaneity. She had to get up in the morning, touch her pale face with a little color, fluff her hair, and slip on a *peignoir* of some fetching shade, even if it did nearly kill her to do so. You could run the water hard in the bathroom, and stifle your moans in there.

She didn't feel consciously brave about it, either. She just had to do it, because it was the one thing supremely worth doing, and one does what one must.

One night Hugh had to stay in town on

business. Lilla was in despair, and cried all evening. It couldn't be on account of some men from the West. It must be because he didn't like her being ill. Showing New York to men from the West — that meant a midnight roof, and all the gay girls there—doll girls, untouched and young—the kind of girls that Hugh liked.

Miss Tillotson was grave and kindly. She told Lilla that she was making a great mistake in "trying to keep up so." Of course, Miss Tillotson didn't understand Hugh!

Hugh said that he hoped the baby would be a girl.

"It 'll be nice to have a young girl in the house," he said, "when you and I are middle-aged."

Middle-aged! If they had a daughter, a young girl, when Lilla was middle-aged, Hugh would have the contrast before him every day. They mustn't have a daughter. If they did have one, then, still more important, Lilla must never be middle-aged.

Lying in bed most of the days through, Lilla looked languidly over the women's magazines, and read all that she could find to read about rejuvenation, cosmetic surgery, face restoration, and the like. There were wonderful things you could do nowadays to keep young.

With Hugh, middle age didn't matter so much. At fifty, he would still be capable of romance. That was the way of it with men. If Lilla had to sit back in an inglenook and watch Hugh dallying with youth —well, she would die first! It would be easier to die.

Hugh was all she had—all she had ever had. Other women had fun having flirtations, and some of them had careers, but she wanted nothing but Hugh. You *had* to have the thing you wanted so intensely and so exclusively; and you could, too. You could do wonderful things these days!

A friend of Lilla's, in town, died when her baby was born. Lilla cried for hours. Supposing she should die and Hugh should marry again. He would marry another doll, another cunning little thing. She wouldn't be able to lie still in her grave! Their joined laughter and love-making would penetrate to her, wherever she was.

Lilla determined not to die. Hugh said, teasing, that she hadn't any will of her own at all; but she willed to beat death and outwit life.

"Funny child!" said Miss Tillotson. "All women have morbid imaginings."

She was very kind to Lilla, all these weary months. She came and read to her in the afternoon, and talked to her of this and that. She told of her two brothers and their little ways.

"Men like to be comfortable," she said.

"I don't know what I should do without Miss Tilly, Hugh!" Lilla told her husband.

"Yes—she's a comfortable sort," he replied casually.

Toward the end Lilla began to feel better. She felt like herself again, and yet unlike herself. It took a sort of cunning skill to maintain her dolliness when she was heavy and unskillful with her body.

Hugh told her he had never seen a woman so adorable at such a time. She kept him perpetually but always romantically sorry for her. She managed to surround herself with the aura of a princess transformed by some ogre into a shape not her own.

One comfort was that it was easy to make Hugh see things the way you wanted him to.

The baby came, and it was a girl.

The first thing Lilla asked for, when she came out of the anæsthetic, was a mirror. When she saw her reflected face, with pale, damp ringlets over her brow, quite surprisingly fragile and pretty, she smiled and dropped off to sleep. She forgot to ask about the baby—even what it was. When she awoke, two hours later, and they told her, she felt that she had known all along.

Hugh was sitting by her, and he ragged her about it.

"You didn't even ask whether we had a boy or a girl!"

He was kissing her finger tips, the way she liked him to.

"I knew it was a girl," Lilla said.

Lilla nursed the baby. She had planned not to, but the nurse told her that women who could nurse their babies, and didn't, frequently put on superfluous flesh. That settled it.

IV

Ten years passed. Lilla had begun to get heavier and plumper, after the baby was born. She never again ate naturally. Her fight against obesity, her dreadful diets, began with Joan's birth. She joined a gymnasium, bought herself a rubber suit and a rowing machine, took treatments. Hugh bought a scale for the bathroom, and Lilla's disposition was determined by pounds and ounces.

Lilla didn't have much to do with Joan. Hugh got a nurse for her, and Miss Tillotson came over and took charge when she had measles and whooping cough. Joan loved Miss Tillotson, and was always good with her.

At ten, Joan was grave-looking and incurious. She wasn't a cuddlesome child. Hugh said that she was the image of his mother.

She didn't bring many of her little friends home to play. They couldn't make any noise. Mummy would be sleeping, and squeals and thumps annoyed her to tears.

One day, when she was out, Joan was in Lilla's room, with Nancy Winter. Years afterward, when the girl thought of her mother, she smelled the commingled scent of cosmetics, and remembered the army of bottles and jars and tubes in crowded processional upon the dressing table. There were fat bottles, curious flagons with twisted necks, squatty jars of creams, unguents, astringents, lotions, and bleaches. There were pencils for the brows, little brushes for the lashes, tweezers, perfumes in urns with stoppers of tortoise and amber.

" What does your mother use all these for?" Nancy asked.

" To keep young with," said Joan, fidgeting on one foot.

" But she doesn't. She doesn't keep very young."

" She does, too!"

" She does not. My mother says your mother looks like a doll, and a doll can be any age."

" Mummy *is* young-looking!" Joan singsonged it, as if she knew it by heart.

" She wouldn't be if she rubbed her face all off. The ladies in my mother's card club said so. I heard 'em. They say she used to be pretty, but now she's — now she's––"

" Well, now she's what, Nancy Winter?"

" I can't remember the word they used, but they laughed at her. Anyway, she's not young-looking, Joan Duncan!"

" She is!"

" She isn't! I'm going home!"

" I wish you would, Miss Fibber!"

Joan went into her room, feeling very lonely, and cried. She cried for two reasons—one about her mother, and the other because she had called Nancy a fibber when, all the while, she was the fibber herself. Mummy was always letting her in for messes!

Joan ran down to Miss Tillotson's.

V

FIVE years passed, and Joan was fifteen. In the fall she was going away to boarding school. She was glad of it. Home was horrid! Mummy and dad scrapped most of the time. They always scrapped when they had been to a party. Then mummy cried, and then she sat in front of her dressing table, with its marching, multitudinous army of bottles fat and thin. After that she asked Joan, ten times in an afternoon, whether she looked as if she had been crying, whether she looked a " fright."

" You do, a little," Joan would say.

She was sorry to have to say it, but she simply wouldn't lie any more, the way dad did—not even to keep the peace.

Joan was still grave-looking, with steady eyes and sternly cut young lips. Hugh said she was " a personage."

" She doesn't seem like my daughter!" Lilla sighed.

" Of course not."

Hugh got the right inflection. He knew now what was expected of him, what had always been expected of him; and he almost always said what was expected of him, except when they had been to a party, and had had a scrap.

He sometimes said things with a little side wink at Joan. That always made Joan feel a little sick. It was pitiful. It was getting more and more pitiful all the while, like mummy's face, all little channels under the make-up.

Joan still took her friends to Miss Tillotson's house. Mummy was at home most of the time nowadays. She had a massage and a facial every day. Then there were the hairdresser, the manicurist, the chiropodist, and others. She took a lot of medicine, too, and it made her feel ill.

Miss Tillotson spoke to her about that.

" You're making a mistake, my dear," she said. " You'll suffer for it, later on."

" But it does keep you down," Lilla would answer. " I've got to keep my figure. You don't know Hugh, Tilly!"

" They had a party at our house last night, and your mother got frightfully squiffy."

It was Nancy Winter speaking.

"That's not all," Joan's cool voice cut in. "You can't come here any more when mummy's home, Nancy—not for a while, anyway."

"Why on earth not?"

"You must have been flirting with dad. I heard mummy say that if she ever caught him dancing three dances straight with any girl, the way he did with you last night, she'd make a scene then and there."

"She did make a scene. She always does, Joan. They let me stay up an hour, and your dad danced with me, because none of the boys in our set were there. He's a peach! He was having a rotten time, and I tried to be nice to him."

"Poor mummy! She simply went off the handle about it."

"I know why she did, really. It wasn't so much about your dad and me."

"What then?"

"She heard that young Mr. Folk say, 'Look, here comes When-Grandmamma-Was-Young!'"

"Oh, Nancy!"

"Well, it serves her right, Jo. Every one says so. You don't have any life of your own at all. Your whole house is cluttered up with cold creams and things. She won't let you have parties here, because she's afraid of your girl friends. She won't take you any place with her, because she tries to hide you. It's rotten!"

"She isn't well, Nancy. She's awfully sick most of the time, really."

"Why does she go to parties, then?"

"She thinks dad wants to."

"Oh, piffle! She makes me sick. She only wants one thing, and that's herself. She wants to be as young as we are, and she can't be, and so she hates us all for it. She looks like a false face for all her pains!"

"Nancy Winter, that 'll be enough!"

"I'm sorry, Jo, but you ought to see the facts, even if she is your own mother."

"That last is the fact you seem to overlook, Nancy Winter!"

"I don't at all. Miss Tilly's more of a mother to you than your own mother."

"I think you'd better go, Nancy. What's the use of this?"

"Very well, miss—I'll go. Like mother, like daughter, I suppose!"

Joan went up to her own room. She passed her mother's door and turned her head away. She didn't want to hate her, but the smell of that room turned her stomach.

Joan spent most of her school holidays, after the first summer one, visiting. On her first summer vacation she brought her roommate home with her, and they had a frightful time of it. Dad was polite to Helen, and mummy cried and carried on. Helen came from an old-fashioned home, and couldn't understand it. It caused an estrangement between the girls.

Miss Tillotson was away that summer, on a fishing trip with her brother, or things might not have been so bad.

Joan didn't bring any more of her friends home for a year and a half. Then she brought Daizie Menjou, the most popular girl in the school.

Joan admitted afterward that she didn't know what she could have been thinking about. The time she had spent away from home, she said, must have dulled her perceptions. She had partly forgotten how things were. Absence had softened mummy's tantrums to figments of dreams. Besides, it was a triumph to be the one to bear Daizie off. It was by way of being a "scoop."

Dad said that Daizie was "an adorable child," and that trifling indiscretion of speech made mummy hate Daizie. Mummy followed them about on sleuthy feet, as if trying to discover something. She would come upon them suddenly, when they were sitting in the living room—Daizie and dad and Joan—and say:

"What have you been talking about?"

"Where's your father?" she frequently asked, with a suspicious inflection.

VI

One night at dinner—that last night—she drank too many cocktails. To Joan's horror, she began to talk like Daizie, with Daizie's slight, delicious foreign accent. She made eyes and giggled.

Hugh spoke sharply to her—it was really too much—and she left the table, with a little clatter of silver falling upon her plate. They could hear her going up the stairs, dragging one foot a little, and sobbing in her throat with painful dry intakes of breath.

They sat in strained silence.

"Your mother isn't well," remarked Hugh. "She isn't well at all. She's taking more and more of that damned medicine. It hits at the heart."

"Poor mummy!" said Joan.

That had always been the only thing she could say. She was ashamed to think how little she had ever meant it.

After dinner Daizie went to bed—with a headache, she explained. Daizie's innate tact was a part of her charm.

Joan went up and listened at mummy's door. It was locked, and from behind it there came, persistently, that dry sobbing. Joan hammered on it.

"Let me in, mummy, or I'll smash through!"

There was a fumbling at the lock, and the door was flung open, as if to say:

"Well, look at me!"

And there was Lilla, for the first time without her artifices, with a face all shrunken and seamed, like roughly handled wax.

"Like a broken doll!" thought Joan.

"Oh, mummy, why do you—why do you—"

There was pity at last.

"You don't know your father! All that I have gone through—you never will know! I've never loved you very much. I've been afraid of you; but I wouldn't want you to go through what I've gone through. Don't marry a man like your father! It's so hard, and you're all against me—beating me—bringing her home with you—"

It was a torrent of incoherencies; but Joan thought she understood. The years behind her marshaled their facts up to this point, where she could understand.

She was kneeling by the bed, cradling the twitching figure, smoothing the ridiculously bright hair.

"Mummy, dad wants you to be happy—I know that. He wants to be comfortable. He wouldn't hurt you for the world!"

"Young girls — he's always been after young girls, and you bring them here! You don't understand, Joan — you're too young!"

She said it with a little moan, and then the tears came in gushes, hard, reluctant, hateful, against Joan's soft young breasts.

Two hours later, Joan crept down the stairs to where her father sat reading. Her face was white and pitiful. Hugh Duncan looked up at her.

"She's gone to sleep," the girl said. "Oh, dad, the poor little thing!"

In the morning, they found her dead.

"She died in her sleep," Hugh said.

Joan put rouge on the thin cheeks and arranged the bright hair as Lilla would have wanted it arranged. Joan insisted upon the most charming frock, too.

"She would have wanted to be like this," she told her father.

People came and looked at her and said:

"I never knew she was so old."

"We shouldn't have let people see her," Joan said. "She would have hated to hear them say that."

When it was all over, Joan settled down at home for the winter.

"I'll take care of you this year, dad," she said. "Maybe I'll go back next year. I can make it up somehow."

The following autumn, Hugh married Miss Tilly.

Before she went back to school, Joan packed away Lilla's things—dozens of frilly frocks and silk things, dozens and dozens of jars and tubes and bottles. She cried over them a little.

"I think I'll give them away," she thought. "They've never been any use!"

LESSONS

You taught me poignant certainties
Which I shall not forget—
The clear futility of hope,
The transience of regret.
Endurance, doubt, and solitude,
Dreams that are past recall,
Denial and renouncement—
At last I know them all.
Oh, alien and dauntless things
I learned from your gray eyes,
But sometimes I could almost wish
We were not quite so wise!

Ruth Forbes Eliot

The Way Women Are

THE STORY OF A GIRL WHO PURSUED FAME AND A YOUNG MAN WHO PURSUED THE GIRL

By Edwin Palmer

A LOW-SWUNG maroon roadster sped down Fifth Avenue, swept under Washington Arch, and narrowly escaped plunging into the fountain in the middle of Washington Square. The red-haired young man who drove the roadster paid no attention to his car or to the threatened bath in the fountain. He casually turned the switch and leaped out, leaving the car in the direct path of a vitriolic traffic policeman and two buses. Hatless, the wings of his raincoat flying, and his red hair a defiant rag to the already angry "bull," he plunged on, shouting.

"Hey!" he screamed in a high-pitched voice. "Hey, Sally Hughes! Oh, you Sally! Hey!"

His voice, his manner, and especially his red, red hair were loudly suggestive of a fourteen-year-old boy in a small town calling the sweetheart of that school term. "Sally" might be any pig-tailed girl who lived on Main Street or its adjacent tributaries. To hear such a voice, to see such a manner, to observe such red hair flaunted shamelessly in a quarter of New York whose reputation for unconventionality is not wholly deserved, was unusual, to say the least.

Bobbed girls and long-haired men looked at him through their respective tortoise-rimmed spectacles and considered him *gauche*. Teddy Roberts, the most notoriously unconventional person in the Village, turned upon him and muttered:

"How provincial!"

In short, the manner and words of the red-haired, reckless driver of the roadster were not such as to win the approval of those who proclaim that every one must be free to live his own life. Like most self-styled apostles of freedom, they would have denied this vital and violent young man even the wormlike liberty of existence; and certainly he should be prohibited from causing a disturbance in peaceful Washington Square.

At least nine-tenths of the young women who dismounted from the bus at its southern terminus turned to look upon the wild youth who had called a member of their sex. Some were revolutionary enough to consider him both *gauche* and *bourgeois* because of the car he sported, but by and large they were stirred by the brilliant redness of his hair and the altogether charming joyousness of his voice. Each of them, in her heart, hoped that some day a man would call her in just such a way as this fellow was calling his Sally. A man who could call a name with that joyousness and that disregard for convention would certainly be interesting.

Among the women who stood there, halted by the young man's cry, there was one who stamped her foot furiously after recognizing him, bit her lip, and turned to walk away. Elbowing her way through the little crowd, she became conspicuous; and as the man repeated his cry more loudly at the very moment when she was trying to get away, she became identified with the Sally of his eloquence.

"Oh, you Sally!" piped a little Italian bootblack. "Wait for him, Sally! He's coming running. Be a sport—wait for him!"

Blushing furiously as the laugh went up around her, the girl also started to run. The red-haired young man pursued her, still calling her name as loudly as he could, and apparently laboring under the misapprehension that her hearing was defective. The louder he called the faster she ran, heading off in a southwesterly direction toward the corner of MacDougal Street.

The irate traffic officer released the brakes of the roadster and pushed it out of the way, cursing fluently in an American dialect that sounded like Gaelic. Perspiring from the unaccustomed labor—he seldom had more to do than to raise his official hand in a lordly fashion—he now glanced up to observe the red-haired lunatic escaping from him. There were so many spectators that he seemed called upon to do something about it, and he gave chase. He was impeded in this, however, by many hilarious small boys, whose appreciation of the ancient comic device of pursuit, especially pursuit by policemen, had been tutored by the suave stars of motion picture comedies.

By this time the girl had reached the corner of MacDougal Alley. She darted past a speeding taxi into its maze of bright-colored restaurants, studios, cobblers' shops, garages, and barns, which were once the respectable haven of weary equines, but have since been given over to playhouses without fire exits and similar cultural workshops. The red-haired man was almost at her heels. From his repeated cries and continued pursuit, it was difficult to determine whether he was the mad hero or the infuriated villain. As to the policeman, left some distance behind, it was plain that he was both mad and infuriated.

Reaching a former stable that had been "done over"—at least exteriorly—and which bore the proud sign "Penumbral Players," the girl ran into a narrow, dark door, through an auditorium with movable chairs, and up to the small stage.

A rehearsal was in progress, halted for a moment for a discussion between the designer of penumbral scenery and the stage director. The lady who had designed the scenery was even now in a penumbral state. Between puffs of a very long cigarette, with her eyes tightly closed, she was speaking in the rapt accents of a mystic.

"It's all blue to me—all blue," she was saying mournfully. "Is not that the very soul of the play, Vincent? Don't you feel as I—isn't it all blue to you, too?"

Upon the stage, Vincent also closed his eyes. This was not really necessary, however, for he was so nearsighted as to be almost blind, and he could never distinguish colors.

"Yes," he sighed heavily. "It's all blue to me, too—all blue."

Into this solemn scene burst the fresh-faced girl who had fled from Washington Square. She was not even breathing hard after her run, but her cheeks were as red as if she were blushing, and her eyes sparkled. Not only did she break in upon the melancholy reflections of the two penumbralists, but she literally bumped into Vincent, whose slight frame was sent into the wings by the force of the impact.

Before the designer of scenery had opened her eyes, and before Vincent could even rise to his feet from the floor, where he lay gasping, the girl ran to him and appealed to his chivalrous protection.

"Save me! Save me!" she cried, throwing herself into his arms. "I am pursued! He is following me! Oh, hide me, please! Don't let him find me!"

Vincent heroically emerged from his blue dark.

"My dear Sally!" he began judiciously. "What's all this?"

"Hey, Sally! Oh, Sally!" cried a high-pitched voice from outside.

Sally seized Vincent's hand dramatically.

"Hide me!" she whispered.

The clamor of running feet in the areaway spurred Vincent. Thrusting Sally behind him, and pointing to a door at the left, all but concealed by draperies, he told her to hide there.

As soon as she disappeared, he strode manfully across the stage to the side from which Sally had entered. He waited there for the red-haired tornado with the voice of a joyous robin. He was rewarded by being struck by the catapult of that young man's presence. Nevertheless, Vincent was resolved that no one should pass that door. He barred the way, and glared at the red hair of the pursuer.

Outside, in the orchestra, the lady with the closed eyes was still murmuring:

"It's all blue to me!"

Vincent knew now, in spite of being color-blind, that it was as red as the Bolshevik flag. Unfortunately, he proved a most ineffective barrier. The other man strode past him as if he were nonexistent.

Standing in the center of the stage, with his hair gleaming as if lighted by six "spots," the intruder looked all around for Sally. Seeing her neither upon the stage nor in the orchestra, he cupped his hands to his mouth and cried again:

"Hey, Sally Hughes!"

There being no response, except a startled scream from the designer of scenery, the young man proceeded to investigate the stage. He peered into all the nooks and corners, upsetting some of Vincent's most cherished properties, opened dressing room doors, and continued to call the girl.

Sally remained concealed in the hiding place to which Vincent had assigned her. The door of this room was so covered that the young man missed it in his search, although he was thorough and methodical. Unluckily for him, his quest was brought to an unhappy end by the advent of the puffing policeman, who abruptly laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder and placed him under arrest for disturbing the peace, blocking traffic, violating six ordinances, and for being a suspicious character.

The young man devoted some of his abundant lung power to argument, but without result. He was led forth into MacDougal Street, amid the cries of the crowd that had followed the policeman.

" Oh, you Sally!" was the cheerful greeting that rose on all sides.

From his previous actions no one could have judged the young man shy, or diffident, or ill at ease. Now, however, in the firm grasp of the policeman, surrounded by the jeering army of the unemployed, his blue eyes took on a startled look, and his cheeks became almost as red as his tousled hair. Nonresistant and speechless, he was led away.

II

RODERICK DUNN, variously known to his friends as " Roddy " and " Reddy," appeared before the high desk of a police lieutenant, and pleaded not only his own case, but that of all lovers under the sun. His red hair was still uncovered, and his assurance had returned to him.

He explained, in the language of love and poetry, that he had not meant to violate any of the ordinances designed to regulate New York traffic. Never would he intentionally break a rule laid down by organized society and enforced by the police; but this time, he thought, the circumstances were somewhat unusual. He was sure that the lieutenant was a man after his own heart, a man who had loved and lived, a man to whom the emotional fevers and fervors of love were as clear as they are to Sigmund Freud. Therefore, with the lieutenant's permission, he would explain his apparent madness and his excusable violation of the law.

The lieutenant, believing that the proper study of mankind is man, allowed him to go on.

" Sir," said Roddy, " I am the victim of a great passion. I have been in love, and with the same girl, since I was seven years old. We have fought and made up. I have slapped her face, and she has slapped mine. We get on very well together. I have cursed her and then kissed her. She has cut me dead and then called me on the phone to say that she was sorry. Behold me now, twenty years after the birth of that love, and she is as far from me as ever —farther, in fact. Do you wonder that I am driven mad, and go through the streets shouting like a lunatic?

" We were engaged to be married. Happy man that I was! The world was rosy, vermilion, scarlet, crimson. Life was worth living. The unattainable was about to be attained. And then what happened? Through the colossal, incomprehensible tactlessness of my estimable aunt, the young lady of my heart was informed that our marriage had been planned years ago by our respected and esteemed parents.

" ' What of it?' said I. ' That's one thing they did well in those days!'

" Can you believe it, sir, that she then and there refused to be married to me? The romance of our love was wrecked. To her it became a dull, mercenary affair, patched up by old fogies who had never read Freud or Havelock Ellis or Ellen Key. She left me flat. You behold me flat. She came to New York—to the modern Babylon, sir—to hew a career for herself, to carve a niche in the hall of fame. She came for freedom, life, and the pursuit of solitary happiness, leaving me to my unhappy fate. I followed. For weeks I have sought her, lucklessly. To-day, at last, when I was in my deepest despair, on the point of ending it all—and that, too, would be breaking the law—to-day, sir, I saw her on a bus going down Fifth Avenue. I followed madly, forgetful of traffic rules, forgetful of all save the face that would sink a thousand ships if I had them. I called to her, and she ran. I sped after her, risking her life and mine, and she would not answer. I could not find her. And then your worthy officer came and brought me here.

" I am an unhappy man. If Sally is not for me, it would be a kindness to lock me up. Do your duty, sir, but I appeal to your kindly and sympathetic heart. You understand me, don't you?"

The lieutenant punctuated a yawn with a long pencil.

"Sure!" he said agreeably. "I understand you—you're a nut. Lock him up, Clancy!"

After spending the night in jail, sleeping beautifully, Roddy was led into the austere presence of a rotund little magistrate. He made a still more eloquent appeal to a heart which he knew to be still more full of understanding and pity. The magistrate listened judicially, smiled amiably, and sentenced the young man to ten days on the island.

"Thank you, sir," said Roddy. "It will be to me what Tahiti was to Gauguin. I shall make it famous!"

III

WHILE Roderick Dunn was the guest of the great city of New York, Sally Hughes spent most of her time on the stage of the Penumbral Players, or in the company of the talented director, Vincent Hopkins. Under Vincent's direction, she was to become a great actress, appearing in only such plays as would please the limited audience of penumbralists.

Vincent had expressed his artistic creed and purpose glowingly in a little yellow-backed booklet entitled "Penumbralism—What It Is?" which eventually ran into four editions of one hundred copies each. It was this booklet that reached Sally in the happy town in which she was about to become Mrs. Roderick Dunn, and suddenly brought her to the realization that she, too, was a penumbralist. After reading several recent novels in which small towns have been severely dissected and verbally destroyed, Sally knew that she was not intended for that dreary existence. She broke off her engagement to Roddy, and fled to New York to take up art.

In addition to founding the penumbralist movement, Vincent had a lucrative side line. In fact, the movement might be considered the advertising department of his regular business. Vincent was a teacher of stagecraft and dramatic art. Himself a graduate of one of the traditional schools of acting, he realized that a new naturalism had developed in the theater, and that it required a new kind of acting. He became the first teacher of the new interpretative histrionism in New York.

His method was eclectic—which is another way of saying that he borrowed, without giving credit or cash where they were due, from all the leaders in the world of the art theater. He bound the mass of his borrowings daintily together and labeled them, collectively, penumbralism. The word had a soothing sound, and he found a practical seductiveness in its appeal to women who sought art and life and freedom.

The young ladies who appeared in his infrequent and short-lived productions were without exception pay students in his conservatory of dramatic art. Outwardly there was no connection between the two institutions, but in reality a Duse or a Réjane might have knocked upon the stage door of the Penumbral Players and never have won admittance, had she not first paid the fat fee that Vincent required. To appear upon the stage of that dingy little theater was the goal of all the aspirants; and with a shrewd business acumen seldom associated with the artistic temperament, Vincent wisely postponed such an appearance until he had collected as many fees as possible.

In addition to the honor of such an appearance, Vincent held out to his students the promise of praise at the hands of a subsidized dramatic critic on the staff of a liberal but artistic weekly, which never paid its printer promptly nor its staff at all.

With such attractive bait, he found it possible to maintain a studio apartment on the north side of Washington Square and a summer cottage on Cape Cod. Publicly he declared that money was the curse of the artist, that poverty was a stimulus, and that struggle was the first law of nature.

Sally was one of his best-paying aspirants. In fact, according to his investigations, Vincent concluded that Sally was the most attractive student he had ever had. Her father, he had discovered, was the founder of the Hughes Mills, which were a vital part of a great steel company, and Sally herself had an income that was an æsthetic stimulus to her instructor's temperament. If possible, Vincent meant to acquire a great deal more than his usual fees in the case of Sally.

He knew that he was making progress, too. Why, Sally thought him a great hero when he stood up before Roddy Dunn and protected her. That incident had given him an advantage he had never hoped to win. He knew women, and he knew how they adored protectors, and all that sort of thing.

Sally, too, was greatly impressed by the art and the soul of Vincent. To her, he was a real pioneer in the theater, and the work he was unselfishly doing would take its place, in days to come, with that of Gordon Craig and Reinhardt. In fact, he transcended them, went far beyond them—so far, indeed, that the critics could not understand his work, and ridiculed it.

They were lunching in the Cerise Cow, a dim cellar lighted by candles and completely without ventilation, when Vincent told her that she would play the mad heroine of his next production, a grim but lifelike tragedy translated from the Hungarian.

" You will be wonderful, Sally, as the mad girl! You see, in the past, madness has always been depicted as an abnormal, wild thing. They used to give us dark women with streaming, ragged hair and wild eyes with heavy pencil circles under them — all that sort of theatrical rubbish; but we are pioneers. We understand the new psychology. We know that madness, nine times out of ten, is supersanity. Genius—that's what it is. If I were not mad, I could do nothing. Now you shall play this wonderful rôle. You will be supremely beautiful, perfectly natural, and yet you will be completely mad. You will kill your husband—that is a tremendous scene—and six lovers. Madness, they will say; but we shall show them that your madness is the clear, unsentimental sanity of a woman fighting against those who would stifle her freedom. Why shouldn't one kill, if it is the road to freedom?"

His myopic eyes, slightly bloodshot, gleamed weirdly in the dim candlelight. Sally was calmly lifting a forkful of food to her hungry lips when his question broke in upon her dreams of stage success. Rhetorical questions always stumped her. She could never give the right answer until she had thought it over.

" No reason at all," she said at last. " I'd like to kill Roddy Dunn. I'll have no freedom until he is dead. Now there's a man who is mad—but he's not a genius."

" His is the madness of the *bourgeoisie,*" pronounced Vincent, and recalled her to the production of the grim tragedy.

He had a definite purpose in giving Sally the leading rôle. Her name and her beauty would be assets, of course, but her bank account was even more important.

Before they had finished luncheon, he had impressed her with the fact that the play could not be produced without the assistance of five thousand dollars. He would not let that stop him—never! What was money, after all? Somehow, somewhere, he would procure the money, produce the play, and make Sally a great success. He was brave, and he was an artist. He would go through with it; but sometimes—here his weary head sank upon his chest—the struggle was almost unendurable.

At this point Sally announced that she thought it only fair that she should back the play, if only as an evidence of her belief in her own ability.

Vincent feebly protested, and finally consented only because it would allow him to devote more time to the play itself, and to make it better than ever. One felt that he was making a great sacrifice for the cause of art.

Sally's check was in that afternoon's mail.

IV

An unsubdued Roddy left the little ferry that carries prisoners and freemen to and from the island of punishment. He had enjoyed his days in prison, for Roddy's motto was:

" Never pass up a chance for a new experience."

For the first time in his twenty-seven years, he had been in jail. The thought was stimulating, for it linked him with all the heroes of romance who had similarly suffered. He knew now what those gray Russians had thought when sent to Siberia, and he could sympathize with the poor clerk of Galsworthy's " Justice."

He had found the prison not unlike the democracy of army life, except that the men were less fit. His cellmates had been quite amusing, until they rebelled against listening to Roddy's eloquent explanation of his love for Sally.

As he stepped off the ferry, his first thought was of the girl for whom, as he himself would have said, he had suffered the martyrdom and the stigma of incarceration. He wanted to tell her all about it, that she might understand to what lengths she had driven him, and so come to a realization of the intensity of his love for her; but he had also given some thought to the matter of tactics. He knew now that he had pursued Sally in the wrong way, and he tackled the problem of renewing his siege more effectively.

He hailed a taxi, and was driven to his club, where he was lucky enough to find one of its best-informed members reading a sententious review in the library. Roddy was still hatless, and madly in need of a bath, but he paid no attention to his friend's excited questions until he had made a luncheon appointment. Then he was off for a change of clothing.

At luncheon Roddy gave his friend a colorful account of his recent adventures.

"I've got to show Sally how absurd all this is," he summed up, "and get her back to sanity. Then she'll marry me—if I can knock this art thing out of her head. I've thought of a way to make her ridiculous. I'll pack the house with roughnecks who will laugh at all the wrong places—"

"My dear infant," interrupted his friend, smiling condescendingly, "if you had had only a tithe of my own wide and varied experience with women, you would be aware that it is impossible to make a woman know when she is ridiculous. If you try that, first thing you know Sally will become a confirmed Villager, and take up free love or something."

"Remember, you are speaking of the woman I am going to marry!"

"If she'll have you," added his friend. "Now listen to me. Out of my profound wisdom, let me speak. Don't make her ridiculous. Make her a success—a serious, genuine artistic success. Finding it easy to attain, she won't want it. Then, perhaps, if you don't throw yourself at her, she'll want you. That's the way women are."

He proceeded to outline a program of action. He offered himself as publicity man extraordinary, and promised to secure the assistance of all the critics, editors, and producers he knew. Roddy felt that the thing was getting beyond him, but it sounded plausible, and he had to admit that he knew nothing of women, except that he loved Sally, and so—

Came the première of "A Woman Free." Roddy's friend was so active that he even persuaded the conductor of a humorous column to give up a parody he had written, called "A Woman Freak." In other ways, too, he was successful. Sally's artistic photograph—a vague, shadowy, soft-toned thing that bore no resemblance to Sally's healthy self—was published in half a dozen magazines, and pictures of the stage settings for "A Woman Free" were extensively reproduced. The pens of the satirists wrote of other things, and the typewriters of the cynics were sabotaged out of use. Only the serious and the faithful were allowed to comment upon the play. It and Sally were being made famous.

The audience that witnessed the first night was as carefully selected as a jury. The scornful were excluded, and the seats they might have had were given over to out-of-work actors hired to look intellectual and to applaud at the right points. Never did a play have a better audience.

Entering the theater just as the lights went out before the curtain rose, and taking a seat far to the back, Roddy felt happier than he had since the day when he first saw Sally after weeks of searching. His plan had worked, thus far, without a hitch, although it had been expensive.

The curtain rose on a lugubrious scene, but Roddy didn't look at the stage. His attention was centered upon the rows of seats in front of him. Well down toward the stage he saw one of America's greatest theatrical producers. This man had lent his mighty presence, and would later condescend to bestow his favor upon the play and its star, as a result of the work of Roddy's friend.

There is little need to describe the drama or its performance. Its like has been solemnly produced time and time again, and will continue to be produced so long as there are men like Vincent Hopkins and rich young women to play angel to their productions. It was a harrowing affair, and Sally, as an emotional peasant woman, was woefully miscast.

The audience was far better than the play, and the best acting was done by those "out in front." With the exception of a veteran who had played with Edwin Booth, and who was now too weary to keep awake, every one was tremendously appreciative. Sally and Vincent won curtain call after curtain call. Vincent was finally forced to make a speech, and not even that broke the tense seriousness of his auditors. They were worshiping at the shrine of beauty.

Sally was a success. The great producer offered her a contract. Her time was divided between interviewers—whose activities were liberally stimulated by Roddy—and appreciative worshipers. Swarms of amateur dramatists besieged her, asking permission to read their plays. Sally got very tired of it all, and she was especially tired of Vincent Hopkins with his eternal talk of "I told you so!"

She was wise enough to know that success which had come so easily wasn't worth having, and she began to feel that the people who applauded her as a great artist were silly. She knew that she hadn't changed a bit, and yet there wasn't one of her new friends who treated her as a regular human being. Art and freedom and eternal adulation were rapidly becoming dreadfully tiresome.

V

THINKING of all this as she walked in Washington Square, just after she had turned down the proffered contract because it meant a repetition of the stupid round, and had refused to marry Vincent because he had become an insufferable bore, Sally's heart gave a leap of joy when she saw a maroon roadster speeding along at its usual wild pace.

She laughed heartily for the first time in days—not the restrained laugh of a great tragédienne, but with the gay happiness of youth.

"Oh, Roddy!" she called. "Hey, Roddy!"

The red-haired young man brought the car to a stop, looked around, and got out. He stood with his cap in his hand, his hair gleaming, as the girl approached. She came running up to him with a smile flashing and her eyes alight.

"How do you do, Miss Hughes?" he said.

"Miss Hughes! Don't be absurd, silly! Take me for a ride, will you? Take me any place—out in the country, if there's any country left besides Hungary!"

"Charmed," agreed Roddy, and held the door open for her.

He was as courteously silent as any of her interviewers, as worshipful as any Villager. She became furious with him.

"What's bitten you, Roddy? Can't you talk any more?"

"Eh? Oh, yes! I beg your pardon. You see, when a girl I've known all my life suddenly does something tremendous, and becomes famous, great, successful, why, you know, it makes a duffer out of a chap like me. I've never done anything, and you're a great actress. It's rather a blow, you know, when I thought that some day—oh, well, I can see now that you're far beyond my reach."

"*Et tu, Brute?* Roddy, you've disappointed me. I never thought that of you. I wish you wouldn't be ridiculous. When I saw you, I thought I could get away from all the nuts and hear some one talk sense again. How are the new puppies? Did you buy the pony you saw at—"

A sudden change came over the young man. He thrust his chin forward, and his hair seemed to burn brighter than ever.

"You want to hear some one talk sense, do you? Well, here goes! I want to tell you that as an actress you're the worst I've ever seen in fifteen years of show-going. As for that play, it's beyond words—impossible. Hopkins's direction was appallingly stupid, the sets were terrible, and the theater smelled of cheap disinfectant. The place should have been pinched. You were utterly absurd. Your enunciation was bad, your speaking voice is untrained, you have no stage presence, and as a tragedy queen you're funny. That's what I think of your career and your success and everything you gave me up to win. Well, you can have 'em. If you're going to make yourself ridiculous this way, I'm darned glad you didn't marry me!"

He suddenly felt two arms about his neck and soft lips pressed against his. Regardless of them, he concentrated upon steering the roadster.

"Attaboy, Roddy! That's just what I think myself!"

He turned incredulous blue eyes upon her.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded.

She nodded emphatically.

"All right, then," said Roddy. "If you'll cut out all this nonsense, I'll consent to marry you; but I'll be darned if you ever get on a stage again!"

Her arms held fast, and love was in her eyes. Roddy was almost overcome by her complete surrender; but he thought of something that he had not told her.

"That is," he went on, "if you'll marry an ex-convict!"

"I will—when it's you," she said.

When Roddy told his friend about it, that learned man nodded thoughtfully.

"That's the way women are," he said out of his wisdom. "But never let her know how she became a success, or you'll have her back on the stage, fighting to make good on her merit, and prove that we're all in the wrong. That, too, is the way women are!"

The Bullfighter

A ROMANCE OF THE THRILLING SPORT OF THE ARENA

By T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright," "East Is East," etc.

XIX

RAFAEL'S dissertation on the right and wrong of marriage did not convince even Socorro Jiminez; but it soothed and comforted the girl, and lent her a certain moral support, to know that her brother upheld her course. Still, there was no escaping the fact that it was very, very wrong of her to sit in the garden with Señor Angel and allow him—nay, virtually invite him—to kiss and embrace her, as she had done.

After she had returned to her room that night, the enormity of her conduct so grew upon her and shamed her that she could not even remember how Rafael had arranged the logical members of his syllogism to make her appear in the right. Finally, restlessness routed her out of her chamber and sent her over to Rafael's study, for a restatement of the grounds of her defense.

But Rafael had that mercurial type of mind which never repeats a formula. This time he justified his sister's conduct by telling her that all human life was a compromise between the laws of society and the individual will. The objects of these two forces were usually diametrically opposed. Any social body made an effort to preserve itself, and that was the reason for the convention forbidding marriage outside of one's own circle. On the other hand, the individual was impelled toward mésalliances to reinvigorate the original human stock with the increased vitality of a mixed breed. So all human life whirled about these cross currents — aristocracies tending to destroy life and preserve social forms, the individual tending to renew life and destroy social forms.

"Now that is why an outside marriage pleases a girl and shocks her family," said the poet, smiling.

"But which is right and which is wrong?" demanded Socorro, with the feminine desire for a rule of thumb.

"My dear sister," laughed Rafael, "if you want a commandment, go to the priests. If you want to do as you please, come to the philosophers."

That was all she could get out of Rafael—nothing very definite or satisfactory. However, the *señorita* was not really unhappy. Inside of every woman run two distinct codes, and her fealty shifts from one to the other with the exigencies of her life.

Socorro made her brother promise to go and tell Angelito the family's decision early next morning. Then Rafael kissed her, wished her, rather tamely, any happiness that her proposed marriage might bring her, and sent her away to her own room, while he resumed the grave task of putting into Spanish verse his thoughts on the subject of glands.

Whatever was the disturbance in the Jiminez family, Angelito's pain was more acute than Socorro's, because his sense of loss was more fundamental. It seemed to him that he had irretrievably lost the girl he loved.

He went to sleep with this hag riding his heart. At intervals, all night long, he would struggle out of the vague and symbolic torments of his dreams into a gray hopelessness of ever possessing Socorro Jiminez. In his twilight state of lethargy, desire and tenderness flooded him. His memory became an inquisitor which tortured him with endless repetitions of the kisses he had received in the garden, of the softness of her flesh, of her arms about his

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neck, of the faint fragrances of her hair and body.

These graces, these refinements, these perfumes, this voluptuousness, were in conjunction with the sweetest and simplest innocence. They blended in him a fever of desire and a surpassing tenderness—the unstable combination of a lover. Her phantom came and lingered beside him with an aching sweetness.

Amid the pain of his longing and his hopelessness, the music of the "Hymn of the Sun" slowly reëstablished itself in his sleep-drugged brain—that strange, melancholy movement, the repeated, delicately modulated cadenzas, which were like sad questions asking:

"Can this be love? Is this endless grieving passion? Oh, night, does your sea-blue bowl hold only the waters of desire and sadness and despair?"

The music beat in the bullfighter's brain. By slow degrees his thoughts became bent and distorted with returning sleep, and presently his consciousness was filled once more with the *jacquerie* of dreams.

When Angelito arose, at eight o'clock next morning, the braying of donkeys in Traposo Calle, the cries of the street vendors, the sound of his mother rattling pots in the kitchen, tempered somewhat his nocturnal impression that all existence centered in and ended with Socorro Jiminez. The bustling, matter-of-fact sounds suggested a certain possibility of life proceeding without her.

His bath helped him. In a shower bath, muscles become an end in themselves. The sunshine slanting among the pink columns of his *patio* suggested peace, if not joy. The black coffee his mother served him at the breakfast table revived in him a faint hope that his suit had not been utterly rejected.

Rafael had promised to come and tell him the family's decision. However, if the decision was adverse, he did not expect young Jiminez to come. Among the Latins all couriers bring good news, or they bring no news at all. Almost unconsciously Angelito began listening for the doorbell. If the bell should ring—if Rafael should come—

As he sat sipping his coffee, with rather a drugged feeling from his unwholesome night, there really came a clanging at his door.

The bullfighter upset his coffee. A shock went through every nerve in his body. Old Ana, who had been smoldering at her son ever since he entered the kitchen, now burst into eruption.

"*Caramba*, look at you—jumping as if that was your passing bell! I knew you were waiting for somebody or something—a woman, a baggage, some *señorita* who doesn't care two *centesimos* for you, but is after your bolivars!"

"*Diantre!*" cried Angelito. "Go to the door and see who it is! Don't stand there sputtering all day!"

The bullfighter had half risen, but he controlled himself and sat down again. The ring of the bell could mean only that Rafael had come with an affirmative answer. He tried to take some coffee from his shaking cup into his dry mouth.

"Go on!" he managed to say. "Don't stand there all day!"

Old Ana turned and shuffled off through the *patio* with an obstinate plopping of her *alpargatas*. Angelito watched intently as she disappeared among the columns. After a prolonged wait she reappeared, wearing a sardonic smile in the wrinkles of her weather-worn face.

Angelito watched her anxiously, wondering whom she had seen and what she had done. He thought, with trepidation, that it was not one whit beyond her to refuse Rafael admittance to the house, or to tell him that Angelito was not at home. She might do anything.

She came plopping back with her enigmatic grimace, and then, when she was quite close to him, she drew from behind her a damp copy of a newspaper and flung it down on the table in front of her son.

"There's your *Sol y Sombra*," she snapped. "That's what you were spilling your coffee and kicking the table over about! The boy had brought your *Sol y Sombra!*"

Her sardonic smile grew sourer, and she turned, with a shrug, to her pots again.

Angelito felt the peculiar tightening of the chest that comes of a sharp disappointment. He made an effort to hide this from his mother. He took up the paper mechanically, and unfolded its limp pages.

Over the front page was spread a long description of Juan Leon's fighting bulls, and the complicated methods by which the animals were prevented from seeing a human being from the day when they were calved until the moment when they charged into the arena with barbs sticking in their shoulders.

Angelito could not read the article. The desolating fact that the Jiminez family had decided against him made reading impossible. He stared at the page, and his eyes picked out isolated phrases:

> Raised on the loneliest haciendas—driven by night to the railroad—shipped to the arena in closed cars—driven blindfolded to the *circo*—imagine the fury of a thoroughbred fighting bull when confronted for the first time in his life, in the glare and uproar of the arena, by his natural enemy, man!

Angelito's brain functioned sufficiently for him to know that he was reading about the coming Spanish *corrida*. He began planning some sort of reprisal for his treatment by the Jiminez family.

In the coming *corrida* he was to be second *espada*. He determined that when that moment came, he would carry his part through with such spectacular daring that Spanish impresarios would invite him to the *circos* of old Spain; that eventually he would be making a world tour with a shipload of fighting bulls. Then, when the Jiminez family saw that they had rejected a world-famous man, he could imagine their sensations!

But then he thought he might make Socorro unhappy, and he did not want to do that. The very suggestion of Socorro filled Angelito with a melting tenderness. He would never be allowed to marry her, but even so he would always love her. In the bullfighter's heart there grew up a dim vision of a tenderness and a love for a woman which could persist quite without marriage or any physical contact.

As he sat thinking on this new and wistful possibility, he recalled tales he had heard the priests tell of saints in old times, who loved with all the ardor and passion of earthly lovers, and yet were monks. That was a strange thing, love divorced from flesh; yet here in his own heart he heard its possibility reiterated.

He was thinking wistfully on this point when he heard his name called from the *patio*.

The bullfighter looked around, straightened, then stared. Rafael Jiminez stood in the *patio*, at the entrance of the kitchen, smiling at him. Such a sudden flood of happiness swept over Angelito that he could hardly find his voice.

"Rafael! It's you!" he cried in an amazed voice. "Does it mean that I am fortunate? *San Pablo, hombre,* don't stand there laughing like that!"

Rafael spread his hands.

"How do I know whether you are fortunate or not? You are accepted. That's not the same thing. Send old Ana off on an errand, *mi amigo,* and we will have a little talk."

Angelito glanced at his mother uncertainly, and delayed action a trifle by asking Rafael how he got into the *casa.*

"I found the door unlocked. I thought, everything considered, that I might walk in unannounced."

The bullfighter was more delighted than ever at this brotherly approach in Rafael.

"Sit down here by the table," he invited rapturously. He turned to his mother again with some of his rapture vanishing. "Ana," he said, with some hesitation, "you might go to the market now and buy our *comida.*"

"Yes," interposed Rafael, drawing a coin from his pocket at the obstinate set of the old woman's face. "Take this, Ana. Buy one of your lottery tickets and keep it for yourself. You might draw a fortune."

He handed a five-bolivar piece to the crone. The old woman took the silver sulkily, and started off, muttering. Then, suddenly, she broke into the violent obscenity of a peon enraged, and flung it on the tiles.

"Ana!" cried the bullfighter furiously, fearing lest this outburst might break off his delicate negotiations with Rafael.

Old Ana went on, and the two men looked after her.

"Servants get like that when you keep them too long," observed Rafael. "They get to owning you. I shouldn't be surprised if, when Socorro comes here, you had better get rid of the old virago and hire another girl."

"Yes—yes," hesitated Angelito. He jumped up and rushed over to his companion. "Friend of my soul!" he cried. "I can hardly realize that I am the accepted lover of your sister, that Socorro will be my bride!"

He threw his arms about his friend's neck, and kissed him on both cheeks. The crippled youth smiled faintly as he accepted the bullfighter's caresses.

"My dear Angelito, I assure you that your pleasure is hardly greater than my own."

"I can hardly comprehend it!" glowed the *torero.* "*Hombre,* a saint out of heaven would not be more welcome! To think of my amazing good fortune!"

Rafael patted him on the shoulder, and moved toward a chair at the table. The *espada* went on in his ebullient mood.

"*Caramba,* but I was a despairing man, Rafael! I was afraid that my—er—sitting in the garden would prejudice the *señora* against me."

"It did," admitted Rafael frankly.

"And it prejudiced the Señorita Margarita, too, I suppose—I could see that much last night."

"*Cà, naturalmente,* it did," agreed Rafael dryly.

"I saw that, so you can imagine how I spent the night, dear Rafael. *Diantre,* a night of torture! To fling away by my own act the most beautiful, the tenderest, the most virtuous—"

"My dear Angelito," laughed Rafael, "if you hadn't committed your indiscretion in the garden, you would never have gained *maman's* consent to your suit."

"I gained the *señora's* consent by acting improperly?"

"*Seguramente,* it forced her hand. You know the conventional penalty for such a peccadillo is the marriage of the offending parties, Angelito. It would never enter my mother's head to question that convention, to question the wisdom of giving my sister to a breaker of the rules of conduct."

"It *is* rather a queer punishment," admitted Angelito, who had never thought of it before, "to insist that a lover should take what he most desires. Since you mention it, I wonder what your mother meant by that."

The poet waved a finger.

"*Nada!* My mother meant nothing at all. She simply followed a convention as automatically as an insect follows its instincts. By the way, have you ever thought that the conventions of society and the instincts of animals are exactly analogous?

"No, I never did; but your mother—"

"There is a convention here in Caracas that a youth and a maiden who have enjoyed dual solitude in a garden must marry. Why they should marry, or how their marriage can cancel their indiscretion, is a matter not to be questioned by a woman. It is accepted as a miraculous fact, like the transubstantiation."

The poet's satirical flavor disturbed Angelito in his new happiness. The suggestion that he had in the slightest degree compromised Socorro pained him. He wanted her to appear to the world, as she appeared to him, adorned with a sort of celestial purity.

A line of reasoning popped into his head to prove that she still retained her transcendental estate.

"But *mire,* my friend," he began, "listen to this—if there is a convention that two persons shall marry after certain things have happened, then that shows that Socorro has never really stepped outside of the conventions, for there is a rule governing her case."

The crippled youth began laughing again.

"You really are in earnest, I suppose, about wanting my sister to be a very paragon of propriety!"

"*Seguramente, señor.*"

"I fancy you never had a sister."

"No."

"I thought not. They don't come like that. However, listen—I will give you a more comfortable way of looking at conventions than what you have. You place too much accent on conventions, and too little on persons. You have observed that some conventions are a little flexible, as in your own case. Why is that?"

"*Cà!* To save us suffering, I suppose."

"Not at all. It is because the persons who break that particular convention are the most ardent, and therefore the most valuable individuals of our race. Their offspring will be the most vigorous, and will have the greatest share of the *élan vital* which propels life to its mysterious goal. So, you see, this whole disturbance is the very greatest compliment that could be paid you. Instead of holding the episode in regret, you should wear it upon your sleeve as a decoration."

"*Caramba,* what an idea! And did your mother think of all that? She must be the wisest—"

"My mother think of it? *Diantre,* no!" cried Rafael, amazed. "That is simply the rational foundation at the back of her instinct. She submits to it with ill grace and much complaining, but if I should tell her why she submits to it, she would think I had gone utterly insane."

"Then, *diablo,* why does she—"

"My dear fellow, how does a bee fly straight to its hive after wandering and turning among flowers all day? Women are the custodians of life. They divine its necessities. They sacrifice themselves, their kin, their loves, their ambitions, and even their vanity, at its behest. My dear Angelito, it is a miracle. It is the finger of God!"

The two men sat for some moments in silence.

"I shall tell that to Socorro," the bullfighter said, after a time. "I know it will make her happy."

The poet held up his finger.

"Don't do it. Human beings, Angelito, are occupied mainly in justifying their actions to themselves. A man always saves his face by reasoning away his peccadilloes. A woman dismisses hers according to how she feels. That is why every reconciliation between the sexes must be based on simple forgiveness. They have no mutual ground for explanations."

"Then I had better not mention this to Socorro?"

"No—she already feels perfectly at ease about her conduct. The best thing you can do is to assist her in forgetting it."

Rafael picked up the copy of *Sol y Sombra* which Angelito had dropped on the table, and glanced idly through the paper. The bullfighter sat glowing over his suddenly changed prospects.

Into what a family he was marrying! His brilliant brother-in-law, his heavenly wife, even his aristocratic mother-in-law! What a step up for a peon boy born in the slums of the Matadero!

His pleasant musings were interrupted by an exclamation from Rafael.

"What is it?" asked the bullfighter.

"*Diablo,* listen to this!" cried the poet, and in a voice trembling with wrath he began reading an article from the paper:

A CALL TO PURITY

Aristocrats of Caracas, take heed! We have been too lax in our solidarity. We have been negligent guardians of the sacred blood of the old Conquistadors. Into that pure stream is draining turgid, bestial peon blood, which is stultifying our lineage, dulling our intellects, corrupting our manners, and debasing our morals.

Lacking in breeding, courtesy, aplomb, and gentility, the social scum which chance has thrown into our midst does not hesitate to go to the extremes of indecency in order to force itself into matrimonial alliances with the aristocratic families of this city.

Not long ago the writer of this article had the painful experience of seeing a certain peon, who has some notoriety as a bullfighter, seated at midnight in a garden with a *señorita,* unaccompanied by any *dueña.*

This young woman has hitherto been of the most honorable repute, as well for her modesty as for her beauty and talents. Without doubt this scurrilous killer of bulls—it would be too great a compliment to call him a *torero*—inveigled the young lady into this compromising position, but for which her family would never have countenanced the low and vicious purpose of forcing his marriage to the unfortunate *señorita*—a marriage otherwise impossible.

With such contemptible devices, fellow aristocrats, is the *canaille* intrenching on our racial purity. Such conduct is worse than seduction. Seduction slays one individual; mésalliances contaminate the race. Such unions should be ostracized by society and banned by our holy church.

During Rafael's passionate reading the bullfighter sat listening with vague comprehension. All that he gathered distinctly was that a bullfighter had sat in a garden with a *señorita.* This much of the philippic came home to him with a certain familiarity.

"Who wrote it?" he asked.

"Who should write it," cried Rafael, "but Narciso Montauban?"

"What did he say about a garden?" inquired Angelito.

"*Diablo,* he publicly accuses you and my sister of sitting in a garden together at midnight!"

"*Cà,* that is a fact!" ejaculated Angelito uncomfortably.

"*Fuego!*" cried Rafael, striking the table with his fist. "What if it is a fact? Is Montauban to be allowed to publish every indiscretion my family commits?"

"Did he really say us? I didn't hear any names."

"He said that a *torero* had induced a *señorita* to sit with him in her garden. You know everybody will know whom he is talking about!"

Angelito frowned, but in his heart he could not help feeling pleased at the distinction. Such a tale would cast a certain glamour over him in the *circo.* However, he frowned and growled out:

"*Caramba,* I am clear enough, but by good fortune your sister's name is not mentioned."

"*Hombre!*" cried Rafael. "He couldn't have made it plainer. He says that you are going to marry her, and that such a thing is worse than if she had been an indecent woman."

The bullfighter half rose.

"What—Socorro worse than a common baggage?"

"Here he says it!" replied Rafael, striking the paper.

"Socorro an indecent woman!" A sudden quaking wrath went through the bullfighter's powerful body. "May the lightning of God strike him dead! I'll go down and break every bone in his—"

The peon started impulsively for the *calle,* his nostrils expanded, ready to smash his enemy. Rafael saw that he was really leaving the *casa,* and limped rapidly after him.

"Here, what are you about?" he cried.

"I am going to the office of *Sol y Sombra* to smash that snake!" he cried.

"Stop! You can't do that!" warned the poet.

"Why can't I?"

"You can't go into a man's office and start an ordinary street brawl!"

"Hell's sacred devils, I can, and I'm going to!"

"Angelito, you'll disgrace yourself. You would be the butt of everybody's scorn. It isn't done!"

"But I am going to whip him! I'm going to smash him to bits—calling Socorro Jiminez a baggage!"

"That's all right, that's proper, but you'll have to challenge him formally. You can't go blundering into his office, breaking up the furniture, and getting yourself arrested and dragged to the police court. You must challenge him as one *caballero* challenges another."

Angelito controlled his wrath, with a sensation as if again some one had checked his mighty muscles with the trivial threads of wont and custom.

"When will we get to fight?"

"Your seconds will arrange that."

"I'm going to fight him and kill him!" roared the bullfighter, as if Rafael opposed the idea.

"You are quite right in that, Angelito. It will clear up your record as a man of honor and reinstate my sister's good name. Just how it does it, I don't know; but it does. It's another miracle, I suppose, like the loaves and fishes. Anyway, I'm glad to see you take that course. I had thought of challenging Montauban myself, but it's better to come from you."

"Yes, yes!" agreed Angelito sharply. "That's right!"

"Now the question is, what arms are you the most skillful with—swords or pistols?"

The bullfighter came to a halt and considered the question.

"I suppose I'm best with swords."

XX

WITHIN the next forty-eight hours all Caracas was gossiping about the article in *Sol y Sombra,* and speculating on the outcome of the Angelito-Montauban duel.

The bullfighters at old Malestar's wine shop predicted a swift disaster for the editor.

"The fight will depend," gesticulated Ercolito, pushing out a double-nine domino, "upon how long Angelito cares to play his man. He will lure him on for three or four rushes, perhaps half a dozen, and then—*pouf!* It is a great pity, because Señor Montauban has talent, and has given us all very good press notices."

The crowd began to speculate who would be the next editor of *Sol y Sombra.*

Among bullfight devotees in the down town districts, the jeweler stepped into brief prominence because he had sold Angelito his plate. This gave the merchant a certain authority on the *torero's* prowess as a swordsman.

"Caramba!" he would say, with a shrug. "What chance has an ordinary man against a trained athlete? Fighting skill is like all other skill, *señors,* it comes with seasoning. Look at me in this business. If a diamond has a flaw in it, be assured that I will detect it at a glance. The years, *señors,* the years make us—fighter, editor, jeweler, what not. The years are like molds which inclose us ever so softly at first, but they become like stone."

"Perhaps it is Señor Montauban's way of committing suicide," suggested an old *caballero* with a skin like parchment. "He is young enough to prefer death to the loss of a *querida.* The young trip to death lightly, *señors,* as if to their partners at a *baile.* Later, when death comes quite close, and you can see his features—"

The old gentleman lifted his shoulders and his brows, and drew down his lips, to deprecate such folly as seen from his maturer point of view.

In the Jiminez villa in Paraiso, it was Señora Jiminez who was most often vocal. She pointed out to Socorro, to Margarita, to Rafael, innumerable times, what came of receiving a bullfighter into the family—an instantaneous challenge, a precipitate attack. Holy Virgin, he would be forever fighting and murdering men! They would never have any peace with such a member in their home!

"But, *maman,*" Rafael would interpose, "he had provocation enough. Montauban wrote an article—"

Narciso write such a thing? She would never believe it. If he did, did he not have provocation? For Socorro to give him the mitten like that? How he must have suffered! How he had loved Socorro! And now to be flung over for a bullfighter who goes about flinging challenges without cause!

Here the *señora* would weep in a peculiar manner, holding her face almost still, so as not to wrinkle her smooth, girlish skin, but with the tears trickling out of her eyes. She had practiced this mode of weeping so long that she did it without effort. She was weeping for Narciso, whom she desired for a son-in-law, for his standing in Paraiso would add prestige to her family. Now all her plans had gone awry on account of a peon bullfighter! It was enough to make a good woman weep!

Socorro Jiminez avoided her mother's endless reproaches, as well as she could, by finding tasks in the sunshine of garden or *patio* which her delicately blooming mother carefully avoided.

The impending duel hovered like an incubus over the girl's nights and days. It seemed unreasonable that Narciso Montauban was going to fight over her. Such a thing was in character with Angelito, but Narciso! She couldn't understand it at all. She couldn't think what had come over him.

In her imagination the two men fought all day long. She could see the big *torero* and the little editor making swift lunges at each other. One of them would be killed—the editor, of whom she was fond, or Angelito, whom she loved.

The possibility that Angelito might be killed filled her with the utmost terror. She felt like going to Narciso and telling him that he must by no means hurt Angelito. It still seemed to her that she would have her old sway with him, that he would give up to her out of habit, as he had always done.

But her reason taught her that that was untrue, that he and Angelito were actually fighting over her. Her innocent girlhood had somehow broken down, and had dropped her into the black and tortured currents of life and passion, whose very existence she had never suspected.

One noon the girl stood in the *patio,* binding a new orchid to a piece of wood, in order to root it; but her thoughts were plodding the treadmill of the duel. Presently Rafael came limping from his room. Socorro watched his painful walk, and it filled her with pity. His lameness had somehow taken the edge from his youth.

As he paused to watch her fix the epiphyte to its host, he said that he had been over on Traposo Calle.

"How is Angelito?" she asked, looking at her flower and coloring faintly.

"In the most insolent health, as usual."

"I mean is he uneasy about—"

With a little gesture she signified the fight.

"Not as much as you are, I'm afraid, poor little *muchacha,*" said the poet sadly.

"Then he is—a little?" asked the girl apprehensively.

"*Pues,* no—*he's* not."

She looked at her brother suspiciously.

"What do you mean by saying '*he's* not' like that?"

The poet paused undecidedly.

"I hardly know whether to tell you."

Socorro became alarmed at once.

"You'll have to tell me now," she said in a low tone.

"*Sí-í, naturalmente.* The truth is that I—I am a little disappointed in Angelito."

"*Anda!* How?"

"It's an odd thing. Still, it's simple enough after you understand it. The fact is that he is not a very good swordsman."

"Not a good swordsman!" She stared blankly at her brother. "That can't be, Rafael! An *espada* not a good swordsman!"

"Yes—you see, he has never used the rapier for any other purpose than in the bull ring. He never took lessons with the foils. He — hardly had an opportunity. You probably know that he was a poor boy." Rafael paused, and presently added, in a slightly different tone: "I thought I had better tell you."

The blood receded slowly from the girl's face as the full implication of her brother's warning grew in her mind. She laid the half-bound orchid on a flower box.

"Rafael, do you *know* that he can't use a sword?"

"*Absoluto!* I carried down my foils, to give him a little practice, and to explain a few little thrusts which I know Montauban possesses; but"—Rafael spread his hands hopelessly—"it was no use. He knew nothing about the foils at all. I could touch him at will."

"Then Narciso will—kill him?" whispered the girl.

The poet made a helpless gesture.

"Narciso may possibly wound him and spare his life. I have always found him a generous fellow; but, of course, in an affair of this kind—"

The girl flushed.

"Oh, Rafael, *don't* say 'affair' like that! It sounds so shameful!" She stood with a look of shame and distress in her face. "Why did Angelito go flinging out a challenge, if he is not a swordsman?"

"*Pues,* it was thrust on him, in a way. When he read the attack on you in *Sol y Sombra,* he leaped up and said that he was going to throw Señor Montauban out of his own window. Of course, that was impossible. I told him that a man couldn't commit such a—"

"Why was it impossible?" cut in Socorro. "That was the very thing to do!"

"Go in and raise a disturbance like a street bravo?"

"Wouldn't that be better than being killed?"

Rafael made an annoyed gesture.

"*Caballeros* don't go about mauling persons with their fists. Such a thing would be absurd, impossible!"

Socorro gave up that point.

"Let's stop this duel, Rafael!"

"If Montauban would apologize—"

"Why couldn't Angelito apologize?"

"*Demonio,* Socorro!" cried the poet, outraged. "Apologize because he resented an insult to you! *Huy!* He would far better be killed!"

"*Madre in cielo!*" gasped the girl, giving up this defense in its turn. "This is the most brutal thing I ever dreamed of! This duel is about me, but no one gives me or my wishes a thought. Angelito goes out and is killed to protect my honor! What good will my honor be to me if Angelito is killed?"

Sudden tears stung Socorro's eyes. The cripple put an arm about his sister.

"Don't exaggerate your danger. I wanted to give you a little warning, so that if Angelito was wounded it would not be too great a shock. He will hardly be killed. That doesn't happen often. Besides, Angelito is one of the most powerful and active men I have ever seen."

Rafael was inducing his sister to walk with him toward her room, but his instinct to philosophize impinged on his consoling attitude, for presently he added:

"The difficulty is that Angelito is stepping outside of his class to marry. That is his real tragedy. Among all classes of society men fight for the women they marry. Some men here in Caracas fight with family prestige, some with their wealth, some with their art. The peons fight for their women by kicking and butting. You see, Angelito has climbed up into a new stratum, and so, when he attempts to mate, he meets a new method of fighting—one in which he is not at all trained, and at which he may possibly lose. He is under that natural handicap."

Suddenly the girl began to weep outright.

"Oh, how horrible this is! How horrible! They think nothing at all of me—neither of them. I might be an animal, a thing!"

"Are you really so neglected as you feel, Socorro?" mused her brother. "They are really helping you to decide. A woman usually prefers the winner."

"Rafael, you are outrageous!"

She flung off his arm and went into her own room.

"Now isn't that characteristic?" mused the brother. "Poor *chica!* To show her that all this is inevitable doesn't console her in the slightest degree. Somehow a woman can't lean back on mechanics and allow it to bear her where it will without hope or despair. No, there is something too vital about a woman to endure that. A woman is the *entrepreneur* of life. She will have nothing at all to do with death and the inevitable."

XXI

THE way in which old Ana clanged open the grilled entrance of the blue *casa* and shuffled into the entry told Angelito that she was excited and angry, and that she must have heard of his approaching duel. The bullfighter put down a foot to stop the faint oscillations of his hammock, where he swung between two columns of the *patio,* and lay with narrowed eyes watching the entry. The next moment he saw his mother hurry in with her board of lottery tickets; and immediately she shifted her physical haste into a verbal onslaught.

"This is what comes of running after fashionable *señoritas*—a fight! Getting disgraced in the papers! I have heard it! You might have been visiting a virtuous peon girl, but these silk-stockinged baggages, with half a dozen men hanging after them and fighting and brawling—"

The *torero* sat up in his hammock abruptly.

"Mother, don't speak of Socorro Jiminez like that!"

"*Caramba,* it's true! The world knows what you did. It came out in the paper!"

The bullfighter grew intensely angry.

"That's because the editor was cold mutton for her, and tried to avenge himself by printing lies; but I've stopped him. He'll print no more of his filth after to-morrow!"

"God help you!" cried the old peon woman, aghast. "Are you going to kill a man on account of a demirep?"

The son leaped out of his hammock.

"*Madre,* if you call that lovely, innocent girl a—"

"*Demonio,* isn't she? Didn't she go out in the garden with you at night, and didn't her brother force you into the *casa* at the point of a sword and make you swear on the cross to marry her? Oh, I have heard it all!"

"God's lightning!" roared the *espada.* "Are they venting such damnable perjuries? I begged, I pleaded to marry her! She is an angel on earth!"

Old Ana's eyes widened in apprehension.

"Pancho, you are not really going to marry her, are you? Can't you give them the slip somehow?"

"I'll marry her if the saints preserve my life!"

Old Ana went into a fury.

"A thousand devils! Bring such a fly-by-night into my *casa!* I'll not have it! I'll not endure it!"

A certain relief went through Angelito that this subject was broached.

"Very well!" he agreed, with a little more composure. "I'll not bring her into your *casa.* I suppose that wouldn't do. No mother-in-law gets along with her daughter-in-law."

"What do you mean—that I'm to move out?" cried the old woman instantly. "I'll not move a peg! You can't put me out! Surely, if there is any justice in the laws, a son won't be allowed to put his old mother into the street!"

"No, I mean that you may have this *casa,* and I'll get another. When I get a wife, naturally we must separate, *madre.* You know we have never done anything but quarrel all our lives. You beat me when I was small, and you have quarreled with me since I've been grown."

The old crone became furious again.

"*Cà,* you ungrateful son! All that you remember is my beatings and quarrelings. *Pues,* I remember getting up at night when you whimpered, patching your shirts, and selling mangoes in the streets to keep something in your belly! And now all I get for my slaving is that I quarreled and beat, and you'll turn me out of your home!" Tears of self-pity filmed the old woman's eyes. "May the holy saints forgive you, Pancho!"

She turned away to her own dirt-floored room at the back of the *casa.*

As the bullfighter watched her go, remorseful qualms seized him. He was moved to call after her that he was not turning her out of the *casa,* but would willingly go himself. Nay, more, he would put servants here to wait on her hand and foot; but to all this she shuffled silently to her room, her head wrapped in a coarse black *mantilla,* her board of tickets sagging under her arm. She was deeply wounded, and would remain so no matter what her son did or said.

Angelito drew a long breath of despair. Presently his thoughts came around to the duel that he was to fight on the following morning. He knew by Rafael's manner that the poet was greatly disturbed about the outcome of the duel, but Angelito himself was not anxious. Somehow he could not find it in himself to be apprehensive of the withered little editor. In fact, when the thought of Narciso Montauban crossed his mind, spasms of anger twitched through his great muscles, his nostrils expanded, and the veins stood out in his neck, like the bulls he fought in the arena.

All the rest of the day the bullfighter's mood fluctuated between anger at Montauban, rapture at his approaching marriage, and distress at the idea of having to cast off his old mother. He tried to think of some way to house his bride and his mother together; but when he saw old Ana going about with an obstinate expression on her old face, and refusing to address a word to him, he knew that that was impossible.

In the afternoon he set off to look up real estate dealers, and to find a finer *casa* for his future wife. As he went about town, a number of men spoke to him about his approaching duel, and wished him good fortune.

That evening his duel occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else.

During the night, he was startled by a knock at his door. He was afraid it was the police, who might have come to arrest him for challenging the editor; but it proved to be his mother.

She stood in the doorway, with her face in high illumination from the candle in her hand. She begged Angelito not to buy another *casa* and move away from her. Loneliness would kill her in this great house. She would be like a lonely old bat in a cave.

She began weeping again, and her old face was convulsed with grimaces. Between sobs she promised that she would not scold any more, but would work in silence there in the *casa* as a servant for him and his wife. She said that she would work for the aristocrats once more, as she had worked for them in her youth. For years she had been free from them, but now they would enslave her again. This *señorita,* she knew, was marrying her son for his money, and she would fling it right and left, after the fashion of unvirtuous women.

So the old woman did her cause little good and much harm before she took herself back down the *patio* again.

There is a law in Venezuela, as in most countries, prohibiting dueling, but in Caracas there is a tacit understanding that duelists will not be molested at sunrise in a certain secluded level space beside the Guayra River, just above the Puente de Hierro. The theory is, apparently, that the Caracas police are not up at such an hour.

So the early morning found Angelito and his second, Señor Via, a quick-motioned little man whom Rafael had selected, *en route* for the conventional spot.

The Guayra River is little more than a brook in the dry season, but its flood bed is very wide, and the Puente de Hierro, or Bridge of Iron, spans the whole valley at a great height. The road that leads to this low dueling ground beside the Guayra breaks away from the street at the mouth of the bridge, and runs down into a banana truck farm. Through the rank growth Angelito's cab followed a mere cart track, with weeds and flowers growing in the middle and on both sides.

This rural-looking road reminded Angelito of his boyhood, when he worked on the cacao plantations. On just such roads he rode, a peon boy, in the great two-wheeled cacao carts. Now he was a *caballero,* in a cab, with an aristocrat for his second, on his way to fight a duel for the honor of a *señorita.* Truly the transition was a magical one!

Here the cab driver, peering down between the vehicle and the horses, said that another cab had been along the road this morning.

"The Montauban party," observed Señor Via, drawing out his watch. "They were early, we are prompt."

"I wish we had got there first," said Angelito, feeling that he had lost a certain point.

"That's of no consequence. Remember, you must keep perfectly cool and collected during the encounter. Don't allow a slight scratch to cause you to fling away caution."

"I think I have learned coolness in the bull ring," remarked Angelito, with a tinge of arrogance.

Sure enough, as they rounded the edge of the banana field, they saw two cabs and four men on a level grass plot in the midst of the lush growth along the river bank. As Angelito drove up, the men bowed ceremoniously. The bullfighter and Señor Via returned the salutations.

As Angelito bowed, it struck him as a ridiculous thing to be bowing to a man whom he meant presently to kill. In the Matadero he had been accustomed to starting a fight with boastings, abuse, and obscenity, not with bows.

Señor Montauban's second had a case of dueling swords, which, as Angelito could see, were considerably shorter than the rapier used in a bullfight. The editor's second was a red-headed man, who now approached Señor Via. The two seconds talked together for a few moments, pointed toward the sunlight, which filtered through the morning mists, and chose the positions of their principals with reference to it. Then the red-headed man presented Señor Via with the case of swords, and he, in turn, brought the weapons to the bullfighter.

Both were exactly alike, delicate weapons with silver-wrought hilts and slender blades. Angelito took up one, bent the point to the guard as a test, and then accepted it. It was one of the handsomest swords he had ever seen.

"You will stand facing the north," directed Señor Via. "You will touch blades and then engage. Keep as collected as possible. Don't allow a scratch to irritate you. Now I believe the *caballeros* are waiting on our convenience."

Señor Montauban and his second were advancing toward the middle of the dueling ground. Angelito and his friend went forward to meet them. The other three men, the two cab drivers, and the surgeon grouped themselves near the selected spot, and watched silently, with the keen interest that such a spectacle provokes.

A certain feeling of unreality hung about the whole proceeding for Angelito. It did not seem possible that the small, dignified, slightly bald man who was stationed opposite, with a sword in his hand, could have written the scurrilous attack on himself and Socorro. Nor did it seem that he was really going to fight. Señor Montauban appeared too dignified to do either of these things.

Angelito himself was not in the least angry. As a matter of fact, to fight a formal duel for a stated cause was far too intellectual a proceeding for Pancho Pachecho. Such a proceeding required an abstraction of which he was incapable. The bullfighter badly needed the stimulus of abuse, oaths, and a buffet or two, before he could really begin to fight.

The *torero* stood with his sword held a trifle high, as if he expected Señor Montauban to charge at him like a bull and impale himself on his blade. The steels clicked together, and the two men fell into the peculiar doll-like poise of fencers.

For a moment Angelito stood feeling the strength of his opponent through his blade. It gave before his own iron wrist, and the next moment he lunged rather awkwardly. There was a whisper of steel, and his point passed harmlessly to the little man's side.

The bullfighter recovered with great swiftness, and lunged again. He passed over the little man's shoulder. At the same moment he saw a flicker of steel toward him, and felt a sting in his upper arm.

Angelito sprang back with a little wave of surprise at the adroitness with which he had been pinked; but, although he had retreated, Señor Montauban was just as close as ever. The editor's left arm and shoulder were swung behind him, giving the *torero* no target but the edge of a man.

It was with difficulty that the bullfighter parried his antagonist's thrust. He tried to address his blade and lunge in return, but Señor Montauban kept pressing him back, step by step, and kept him parrying, high, low, middle, face, legs, stomach.

A certain rising anger grew up in the peon at this sharp and persistent attack. The editor was like a machine, that went on perpetually driving him back and back. The *torero* had a feeling that his own sword was too long, that its point was useless.

He made a sharp effort to leap back suddenly, get his sword tip down, and drive in again; but his blade again encountered steel. It thrust off at an angle, while a hot streak up his forearm told him that he had been touched again.

At this second sting, and at the sight of blood staining his sleeve, wrath seized Angelito. There was something monstrous and hateful in this absurd little wooden figure with its edge turned toward him. Now that Angelito was hurt, the wrong this little editor had done Socorro flared up again in the bullfighter's heart. Abuse, unspoken, was on the tip of his tongue, and a pulse began beating in his temples.

He poised his sword as if at an oncoming bull, and lunged terrifically at the little man's heart. His point slithered to one side, but the two men met, and the bullfighter's momentum carried them several yards.

At the same instant Angelito felt a keen pain through the heavy costal muscles under his arm. They were breast to breast. The point of the *torero's* sword was thrust vainly into air behind his adversary, while Angelito was transfixed.

The bullfighter howled an oath, and like a flash loosed his sword and struck a full swing at the editor's jaw. There came a thud. The editor's hold on his own sword loosened, his slightly bald head flew back. The bullfighter lowered his mop of black hair and butted with terrific force into the pit of the little man's stomach.

The seconds and the surgeon shouted in horror at the ghastly sight of a man stuck through by a sword pounding, butting, and kicking a helpless antagonist into insensibility. They rushed on Angelito.

"*Diantre,* stop him! Catch him! Hold him! The madman!"

The three men grabbed and struggled

with the wounded giant. He flung them off with a whip of his body, and continued pounding and kicking his prostrate foe. In the scuffle, one of the men got his hand cut on the sword sticking in Angelito's flesh.

"You damned *bribon!*" he howled. "What a cowardly attack!"

The red-headed second made a leap to get Angelito's sword and kill the bullfighter. Señor Via shouted to forbid it, and succeeded in getting his own arms locked around the big fellow's neck, throttling him and hauling him backward.

Angelito was cursing and roaring that they must let him alone, that he would kill the little imp of hell. In the midst of this his own second throttled his uproar and dragged him backward. It took the three to hold him back.

Montauban's second was in a furious rage.

"This devil from Hades! This mannerless wild man! It is our duty, *señors,* as *caballeros* and guardians of fair play, to kill this mad dog!"

Angelito's own second was crying:

"You infamous wretch, attacking your opponent with your hands! What are you—a *caballero* or a gorilla?"

"Here, you monster," the surgeon was saying, "let me pull that sword out of your side! Are you utterly devoid of all human sensations?"

As the red mist cleared before Angelito's eyes, he saw Señor Montauban prostrate on the ground. He straightened himself, and allowed the surgeon to approach him peaceably.

"The infernal little rat!" snarled the bullfighter. "I'll show him what it means to print his damnable articles about such a saint of a girl! I can whip an *estancia* full of such puny little aristocrats! I'm the best man in Caracas!"

He boasted, and cursed, and held himself stiffly against the surgeon, who was pulling the steel from his side. The doctor had poured iodine on the protruding blade so that it would sterilize the wound as he withdrew it. The iodine felt to Angelito as if the surgeon were drawing a red-hot iron through his flesh. He did not grunt, but he did stop his cursing.

All the party were utterly disgusted at this attack on the editor, so utterly outside the conventions of a duel—all except the two cab drivers, who were peons. These two winked at each other, and made sharp, striking gestures with their fists, to show that they were intensely pleased.

Señor Montauban did not need a surgeon. He was jolted and jarred, but did not have a scratch. Presently he revived, and, seeing the bullfighter's blood on his own clothes, asked if Angelito had wounded him. He seemed to remember nothing of what had occurred.

"No! No! You are not wounded, *señor,*" cried the surgeon, "but you have been assaulted in a most cowardly and shameful fashion. It has been a disgraceful fiasco. I, for one, repent that I came out here at all. To call this spot the field of honor would be to expectorate on decency. The best that all of us can do is to go back to the city and never pay the slightest attention to this unmannerly yokel again!"

He swung his head furiously toward Angelito. The bullfighter was now beginning to be ashamed of his own violence.

"He made me mad," he grumbled in faint extenuation.

"*Caramba!*" snarled the red-headed man.

The two parties climbed back into the cabs, but this time they were divided differently. Neither the surgeon nor either of the two seconds would ride with Angelito. They and Señor Montauban got into one cab, while Angelito and the two drivers used the other.

XXII

By the time the morning mists had fully cleared away from the valley of the Guayra, polite society in Caracas was amazed and horrified at the conduct and the upshot of the duel. Amazement came that Señor Montauban had proved himself a more skillful swordsman than the famous *diestro,* horror at the brutal and shocking conclusion of the encounter.

By noon the most exaggerated tales were all over the city. Angelito, with his bare hands, had maimed his rival for life. The editor's blade had pierced the *torero's* lungs. The physicians and surgeons of Caracas were so outraged at Angelito's breach of etiquette that not one would dress his wounds, and he lay slowly dying in the blue *casa* on Traposo Calle.

Other stories were that Angelito was not dying, but that Señor Montauban would certainly challenge him again, and would kill him the next time; that Angelito had hopelessly disqualified himself as a *caballero;* and so, on and on.

By two o'clock—that is to say, immediately after her siesta—Margarita Miraflores brought a selection of these versions to the Jiminez villa in Paraiso. A number of them were mutually contradictory, but with the ladies that did not shake their credibility, either singly or in the lump.

As soon as Margarita reached the *señora's* door, she began pouring forth her news in breathless Spanish.

"It was a terrible scene, *señora.* Señor Angel was stabbed in a dozen places, and a sword was sticking through his liver when he assaulted Narciso."

The *señora* dropped her embroidery.

"Is he dead?" she inquired, and her voice was ghastly.

"No, but he will die. All the surgeons in Caracas have refused to dress his wounds!"

"Maria in heaven! But why?"

"Because he *assaulted* Narciso!"

The girl stressed the word with a sharp nod.

"But didn't they go out there to assault each other?" said the *señora.*

"Yes, but he threw away his sword and beat him with his hands. He flung him on the ground and kicked him, and all with a sword sticking through him!"

"Through Narciso?"

"No—through Señor Angel!"

"Holy Mary!" gasped the *señora,* turning pale. "That sounds like some wild beast one reads about in African travels."

"Oh, the whole city is outraged at it! Everybody is talking about it, and saying how shameful it is, and what an insult on poor Narciso!"

"*Dios te oiga!*" cried Socorro. "To be flung on the ground wasn't half as bad as to be run through with a sword!"

"Socorro!" cried the *señora.* "It's the insult of the thing, for that great bull of a *hombre* to be beating a *caballero* with his hands! Suppose it had been Rafael! You can see that, can't you? *Huy,* what an insult!"

"Every one says that it was utterly indecent, and must be avenged," rattled Margarita viciously.

"How badly is Señor Angel wounded?" asked Socorro, with a colorless face.

"Oh, badly! He can't get well!" declared Margarita, instinctively giving the worst version she had heard.

Socorro rose excitedly.

"And his wounds are not dressed?"

"Now, Socorro!" cried her mother. "You are not going down there?"

"Of course not, mother, but I want to get a doctor to him."

"But the doctors won't go!" cried Margarita.

"*Pues,* I can send Rafael. He's clever about everything. He could dress a wound."

"Socorro, I can't understand you! How can you consider resuming your unfortunate relations with that man, when he has disgraced himself in a duel? Don't you realize that the whole city is holding him up to contempt?"

"*Absoluto,* every one is talking about it, Socorro," seconded Margarita. "Every one says Señor Angel's honor is gone. He is *sin vergüenza.* He can't live over it, no matter whether he gets well or not!"

"I don't care what they say!" cried Socorro. "He did the most sensible thing, under the circumstances. If Narciso were sticking me with a sword, I'd knock him over, too, if I could! Holy Mary, they were fighting, weren't they? I'm glad he beat Narciso! I'm glad! He's been needing a beating for a long time!"

"Socorro!" gasped Margarita.

"Daughter, what unwomanly sentiments!" cried her mother.

"I don't care! Narciso is a prig, and I could beat him myself!"

"*Socorro!*"

As Socorro hurried into the *patio* toward her brother's room, she heard Margarita calling angrily after her:

"Everybody says, *everybody* says—"

XXIII

RAFAEL JIMINEZ looked up at his sister's entrance, saw her face, and immediately asked in a shocked tone:

"Is he dead?"

"No, but you must go to his *casa* quickly, Rafael. He is badly wounded, and not a surgeon in Caracas will go near him!"

"What?"

"The doctors won't help him!"

Tears filled Socorro's eyes. Rafael dropped his pencil and looked at her.

"Who told you such rot?" he asked.

"Margarita, just this moment!"

"Don't you know that's silly? A surgeon not go near a wounded man—a rich wounded man! Did she say why?"

"B-because he—he picked Narciso up and flung him down during the fight!" gasped the girl.

"Did he do that?"

"Y-yes, with a sword sticking through him. Oh, Rafael, it's horrible! And Narciso is going to challenge him again!"

Rafael got up and limped a little way from his writing desk.

"Stop, don't jump at every wild tale you hear! That's a most absurd story!"

"But, Rafael, everybody says—"

"Says what?"

"That he's in disgrace, and they'll have to fight again!"

Socorro's eyes were full of tears, and she bit her lips, to keep from sobbing outright. Rafael patted his sister encouragingly.

"A lot of that is gossip. I'll go find out what truth there is in it."

"*Bien!* Do go and see if he has a surgeon, Rafael!"

"He either has one or doesn't need one."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am, Socorro. But that tale about Narciso going to challenge Angelito again—I'll look into that."

He started limping about his study, trying to find his hat. Socorro, who had been somewhat calmed by her brother's manner of accepting the news, now started thinking on a less urgent but equally painful topic. She had several minutes for her reflections, for Rafael's room was in disorder, and his hat was lost. When he found it, and was nodding good-by at the door, she asked in a small voice:

"Rafael, do—do you think he really was dishonorable?"

"Who?"

"Señor Angel."

"Quite likely. What did he do?"

"Rafael!" reproached the girl.

Then she repeated, in a desolate tone, that Señor Angel had flung away his sword in the midst of the duel, leaped at Narciso, and butted him over. The poet stood listening. Gradually his composure gave way, and he began laughing immoderately before her outraged eyes.

"*Huy,* Rafael! Rafael!" she cried.

"I can just see Narciso tumbling over," explained the poet. "I know how shocked and amazed he was."

"But was it dishonorable?" pressed the girl impatiently.

Her brother became sober, and made a gesture.

"Now, my dear, what sort of honor do you mean?"

"Oh, holy Mary!" sighed his sister, at the end of her patience. "I might have known I could get no sense out of you!"

But Rafael was not to be denied this philosophic point.

"*Pues,* Socorro, that is a very simple thing," he said gravely. "What we call honor is a term which means the rule of conduct in a certain locality among a certain class. Here in Caracas we have Spanish honor, peon honor, Carib honor, negro honor. Before I could possibly answer your question you will have to tell me to what sort of honor you refer."

"You know I wouldn't speak of Carib or negro honor!"

"Probably not. I was simply giving you an idea of how many codes there were. When you analyze it, any code of honor is what a certain class of folk has found expedient to do under certain circumstances. When a man like Angelito comes up from one social sphere to another, a great many things which were honorable down below are considered dishonorable above. For instance, in a fight, peons butt with their heads, Spanish *caballeros* do not. I should say that the essential ingredient of dishonor is originality, or the element of surprise. Victorious armies have uniformly used dishonorable methods, from the standpoint of the vanquished. Great financiers always have shady reputations. Successful politicians—but really that is too tainted a topic even to use as an illustration."

"Rafael," said Socorro, "from what you say I have no idea what you think about Señor Angel. I do wish you would go and see how he is getting along!"

The poet perceived that his sister was not as much interested in his reasoning as he was himself. He gave it up, went back to his writing desk, picked up a manuscript, put it into his pocket, and turned toward the door.

Socorro watched this act with evident disapproval.

"Rafael, you are not going to read that to Señor Angel, are you? Remember that he is wounded already."

Rafael said he might strike up with some friend or other, and Socorro told him that he was cold-hearted to think of such a thing, under the circumstances.

Oddly enough, when he got outside the Jiminez lawn, Rafael hailed neither cab nor street car, but limped along the boulevard, studying the pavement in deep thought. When he came to the Montauban château, with its heavy, solemn Spanish architecture, he stood undecided for a moment, and then went inside.

Rafael Jiminez never entered the Montauban *casa* without a faint feeling of irony that such a gravely handsome structure should be wasted on such a man as Narciso Montauban. For Narciso to brood in such a nest, and produce such an egg as *Sol y Sombra,* was simple bathos.

"Now," thought Rafael, "the poem I have in my pocket would be worthy of the height of these walls and the spring of this ceiling; but Narciso—"

He shrugged very faintly as he moved with halting gait along the great hallway of the château.

He found Narciso in a study which was as severely simple as the great oaken rafters overhead and the polished floor underfoot were rich. The long, narrow windows gave the study a somewhat monastic effect, which Montauban's slightly bald head accented.

The editor of *Sol y Sombra* was apparently no whit the worse for the drubbing Angelito had given him. He sat at his great flat yellow writing desk, on which were neatly arranged some papers, manuscripts, and a pile of galley proofs.

The journalist was evidently surprised to see Rafael. The poet began a carefully prepared conversation by asking his former friend if he might tell him how shocked and grieved he had been at the appearance of the vindictive article in *Sol y Sombra,* and how deeply he regretted the rift between their families.

At this Señor Montauban's thin face paled somewhat, but he asked in an even voice if he might tell Rafael how shocked and wounded for life he had been when he and Rafael had blundered into the Jiminez garden on the most unhappy night of his existence.

As Narciso said this, he did indeed look, to use his own Spanish hyperbole, "wounded for life." His sallow face had the thin, drawn look that comes from some continued strain. Rafael began to perceive vaguely something of the depth of his former friend's wound—a phase of the unfortunate affair which had heretofore escaped him, because of a brother's congenital inability to conceive of any mortal man really having a tender passion for his sister. Now he suddenly felt sorry for the editor.

"I saw that you were shocked, Narciso. So was I; but even at that I simply couldn't understand your article."

"You couldn't?"

"Frankly, no. I could not understand how a man could sit in a study like this and write such a thing."

The poet's old admiration for his friend's study, and his impersonal attitude toward the insult thrown at his family, aroused in the editor some of his former liking for young Jiminez.

"The truth is, Rafael," said Montauban drearily, "I don't understand it myself. The next morning, when I read my own article in my paper, I was dismayed. It seemed impossible that I had written such a thing. That night I must have been mad!"

"*Olà! Olà!*" ejaculated Rafael, divining the storm in his friend's heart, and marveling that Socorro had caused it. He cast about for some way to console his friend. "*Pues,* after all, Narciso, this—er—misfortune at least will leave you more leisure for your literary work. You did spend a lot of time at our *casa.* I have often thought—"

"You mean my work on *Sol y Sombra?*"

"Yes."

The editor pushed away the proofs on his table, as if they were distasteful to him, and arose.

"I am through with *Sol y Sombra!*"

"You are what?"

"*Dios,* yes—I'll either sell the paper or let it drop. I'm through. I never before realized what barren, futile work it is. To spend one's life recording the doings of illiterate peons who have learned to stick a bull—what a beggarly occupation!"

The poet stared at him blankly.

"What will Caracas do without a sporting paper?"

Señor Montauban made a gesture which meant that it was no concern of his.

"What are you going to do yourself?"

"I don't know. I am thinking of going to Paris."

"For a permanent residence?"

"I think so."

Rafael, still with intent to console, made a few vague suggestions about love and marriage. He said something about the biological tendency of persons to marry their opposites—blondes, brunettes; tall men, short women; fat men, thin women; and, naturally, aristocrats, peons.

The editor did not seem impressed with this theory, for he made no reply.

"What I really dropped in to ask you, Narciso," said the poet, "is this—is it your intention to—er—pursue the unpleasantness of this morning, on account of what Angelito did?"

The editor's expression changed.

"I have never before accepted a blow like that, Rafael!"

"Still, a blow in a fight is not on the same footing as a blow meant as an insult. Besides, Narciso, you might have foreseen that Angelito would have reverted to his peon method of fighting, if pushed to it. That was his reflex action when angered. It would be foolish to expect him to change his reflexes merely because he had a sword in his hand."

"The trouble with you," said Señor Montauban dryly, "is that you utterly destroy honor, will power, and self-direction with your mechanistic theories, Rafael."

"*Caramba!*" cried the poet, rather touched. "Honor, will power, and self-direction are all right as long as one doesn't mix the classes; but when you bring two men together who are fundamentally different, you might know there would follow a confusion of method, and that's dishonor. You ought never to have accepted a challenge from a peon, Narciso, and you certainly ought never to issue one to a peon. Anything so formal as a duel is impossible between men of different classes. All they can do is to fight." The poet bowed. "Now that is what I wanted to say, and I thank you for the courtesy with which you have heard me."

Rafael started limping toward the door of the study. Narciso followed him.

"I am glad you came, Rafael. Your conversation has been a pleasure to me." He hesitated, and then added: "I wish, Rafael, you would tell your sister how deeply I have regretted my impulsiveness."

"I will explain it to her, Narciso. She is really a very generous girl, according to her viewpoint of life."

"I know she is, I know she is, Rafael. Sometimes I have thought that Socorro never did really care for me. I don't know—little things—but she is a generous girl!"

As Rafael limped to the entrance of the château, he felt a little pang of disappointment at having found no opportunity to read to Narciso the poem which he had in his pocket. It did seem that his sister's rift with Narciso was an unfortunate affair for every one.

XXIV

BARRING the contingency of a challenge from Narciso Montauban, Angelito's affairs smoothed and straightened themselves into the commonplace raptures of a betrothal accompanied with passionate love. The bullfighter became a regular visitor at the Jiminez villa. The *señora's* manner toward him softened from open hostility into her original chill and disapproving courtesy. Margarita resumed her light and teasing friendship, and occasionally Rafael called the *torero* into his study to hear his latest poem.

Angelito hit on the device of listening to the verses, nodding solemnly, and saying nothing. This gradually installed him in Rafael's estimation as a man of literary taste—"untrained, you know, but deep in his heart." The *señora* scoffed at such a dictum. Margarita laughed at it. Socorro believed it, and was not surprised.

Nevertheless, the fact that Angelito had challenged a man and had been wounded in defense of Socorro's good name gave him a sort of standing, even with Señora Jiminez. There is no way to satirize or ignore an act of this kind. It is as dogged a fact as money received, and cannot afterward be denied.

Naturally enough, the duel enhanced the bullfighter's attraction for Socorro. She showered on him the blind prodigality of a girl's first full-blown affection. She was at an age when she should normally have had several such emotional experiences, but these had been precluded by the protracted and rather tedious courtship of Señor Montauban.

Socorro had thought, at times, that she was in love with Narciso; at other times she was sure she could never love any one. Angelito's unfortunate dinner caused her to reconsider this point, but it was not until her transfiguration in the garden that there burst on her the possibilities of delight that lay in her brain, her body, and her whole nervous system—in brief, what one means by being in love.

It is true that since the night in the garden Socorro's reaction to Angelito's caresses never reached such complete abandon, except on the evening when he came back to her from the duel, wounded by Señor Montauban. Then the girl quite melted from tenderness and anxiety; but at other times she mixed with her yieldings a certain increasing display of intellectualism. She found herself setting right certain little mistakes that Angelito made in his Spanish, and suggesting little differences in his deportment.

Nevertheless, each evening she awaited her lover's coming with the utmost impatience. She was displeased if he did not first come quietly around to the music room, where she might have him for ten or fifteen minutes before she presented him to the family circle. His step on the walk, his tap at the window, were quite enough to catch her breath, to make her leap up and run to the side door, where she could slip into his powerful arms.

As soon as Socorro's affection had reached this intimate stage, she set about using all her influence to break Angelito's connection with bullfighting. She became chronically anxious for his safety.

"Light of my eyes," she would plead, "it is inhuman of you to torture me by entering the *circo*. Suppose something should happen to you!"

"But what else can I do, little heaven?" he would plead.

"What else, indeed? *Caramba!* What difference does it make whether you do anything at all? You might write poems, like Rafael."

"Holy San Miguel, me write a poem!"

"*I* write a poem," corrected Socorro.

"I write a poem," Angelito repeated after her.

"Rafael says you have talent. Music, then—why not develop your music? Your guitar speaks a thousand voices to my heart."

"But, adorable," he said, drawing her to him and smoothing her hair, "I have a great idea. I want to be the leading *diestro* of the world. I want to sail around the world with a great herd of wild bulls, like Juan Leon."

Socorro was horrified.

"But just think of it, traveling like a king through all the South American republics, going back to Spain, meeting the king himself, and you with me!"

"But how will you do it, *mi vida?*" asked the girl, beginning to be dazzled.

"By the reputation I make in the *corrida* with Juan Leon."

"But, beloved," cried Socorro, "you can't go into the *corrida* with your wound!"

"Oh, my dear, I am like tar. Thrust a sword through it, draw it out, and the place heals instantly. Now feel here at this place in my side, to see how nicely it has healed."

"O-oh, Angelito—I won't do it!"

"Yes, do. It is cured!"

He took her hand, and forced it inside his clothes to his wound. They slipped into each other's arms with the innumerable and protracted kisses of young lovers in hot latitudes.

However, Socorro's anxieties always returned to Angelito's dangerous profession. One day she took the *torero* to Rafael's study, to talk the matter over with her brother.

The girl laid the matter before the poet with vehemence, and demanded that he should show Angelito how wrong he was to continue in the ring.

As usual, Rafael did not give the sort of advice his sister was seeking. He told Socorro that if she hoped to preserve her present tenderness and passion for Angelito, he certainly had better continue in the bull ring.

The girl was astonished and indignant that Rafael should suggest that Angelito's profession had anything to do with her affection for him.

"I am fond of Angelito purely for himself," she insisted tartly. "Do you imagine his risking his life in the *circo* makes me care for him more keenly? It just makes me anxious and miserable, that's all."

"But your anxieties increase your emotions, Socorro," argued the poet, with gathering impatience. "In fact, the danger a man risks is a sort of premium that he pays on his love insurance."

"Rafael, you have chosen an ill time for a joke!"

"Joke! That's not a joke. It is a trait built into all womankind. It is the foundation of romance. You will have to admit that if you had never seen Angelito in the arena, you would never have been impressed by him in the first place."

"Perhaps not, just at first, but now, of course—"

"There you are! You see, it is in your blood. That trait was cultivated in you by hundreds of thousands of years, during which man's chief occupation was fighting. If the old cave women had not acquired a taste for returned heroes, the world would have been given over to cowards, and our race would have retrograded. So, for the man of to-day to hold the genuine passionate attachment of his wife, there must be something risky in his occupation."

"What a shameful idea! Can't a woman love a man for himself alone? That's what every man and every woman wants—love for their real selves"—she tapped her bosom impulsively—"not for their wealth, rank, position, beauty, or anything but themselves!"

The poet wagged a sardonic finger at his sister.

"Nobody has a real self in the sense in which you use the term, Socorro. There is no one thing about you or any one else which is yourself. Every person is a plexus of innumerable influences. His clothes, his wealth, his language, his appearance, his social standing, the house he lives in, the clubs he frequents, his likes and dislikes, his sense of humor, his love of poetry or of beer—all these are factors in his repulsion or attraction for any other human being. All these and a million other items are included in that very vague term 'self.' When a girl imagines she has any one concrete thing in her which is herself, and asks to be loved for herself alone, she is talking nonsense. It is on a par with the belief in Santa Claus, and all the other items in the mythology of childhood."

Socorro looked at Rafael vexedly.

"Sometimes I wish I never had a brother like you! Occasionally you say a bright thing, but I never go to you for anything especial but what I get the silliest talk I ever heard!"

She stood looking at the poet in disgust, and then broke out again:

"The idea that Angelito here isn't one person! That he is like a bundle of sticks, and if you took one stick away—his bullfighting, for instance—perhaps I wouldn't like him any more! I think the main reason you are so silly, Rafael, is because you never loved a human being in all your life!"

The poet watched the two lovers go out of his study without saying anything more.

(To be concluded in the April number of Munsey's Magazine*)*

A THOUGHT OF SUMMER

When winter goes—
Would it were gone!—
With all its snows,
Into the sweet oblivion
Of the wild rose,
So that its very name
Is lost in summer's flame—
Oh, love, when June's sun glows,
And you smell sweet
As flowers do with the heat,
Breathing out myrrh
From breast and mouth and hair,
Oh, I shall play the bee,
And at your flower
Make honey every shining hour,
Or be the butterfly that sips
The nectar from your parted lips,
Or be the rocky pool—
Ah, that were best!—
Whose waters cool
Run over your white breast;
Or the green bank be I,
Where afterward you lie,
All marble to the sky!

Oliver C. Moore

Are you a micawber?

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"My other piece of advice, Copperfield, you know. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure, nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery."

MEET an old friend—Mr. Wilkins Micawber! First introduced to you by Charles Dickens in "David Copperfield". Always procrastinating, always out of money, always "*waiting for something to turn up*". And yet such a good fellow in so many ways.

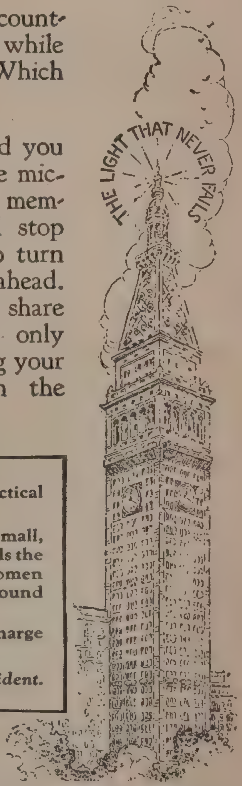
Nevertheless your sympathy went out to his trusting, never-deserting wife and their five children. And today you have only to look about you in every city, town and village—in every office, shop or factory—to see how this little family has multiplied thousands and millions of times. You meet its descendents everywhere.

A micawber is the person who hasn't a penny in the bank, a share in the building and loan association, an interest in any benefit fund or a dollar's worth of life insurance. A micawber is a person who hasn't saved a cent.

CHARLES DICKENS put the word, *micawber*, into the English language seventy-five years ago. Straight-thinking economists put the word, *budget*, into it eighty-eight years before that.

Micawbers prefer to spend what they have and wait for "something to turn up". No limitations of a budget for them! Yet the strange part of it is this: It isn't a *budget* that holds your scale of living down; it's your *income*. In fact, budgeting your expense is a real incentive to increase your income, as well as the best way to get the very most out of what you have now. It tells you just where your money is going, *before it goes instead of afterwards*. The difference between budgeting and accounting is that one looks ahead while the other looks back. Which way do you wish to look?

Get on a budget basis and you will step up and out of the micawber family—if you are a member of it now. You will stop waiting for "something to turn up." You will begin to go ahead. You will begin to get your share of the good things that only savings can buy, including your financial independence in the years to come.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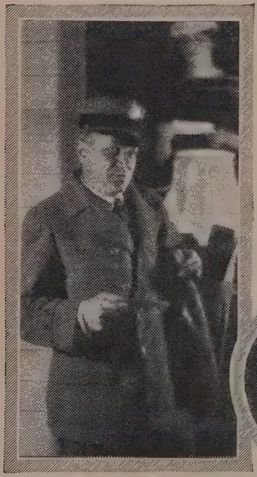
(*A letter from Mrs. A. C. Cowling, an Oklahoman.*)



"I WAS willing to attempt anything to get rid of the terrible pimples on my face and back. Doubting, I ate yeast regularly for one month—and now—no more blues over my complexion—no more a wall flower, but just a healthy college girl who advocates Fleischmann's Yeast to set one right with the world."

(*A letter from Miss Corinne Wiltrout of Logan, Kansas.*)

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(*Mr. J. F. Blackburn of Oakland, Cal.*)

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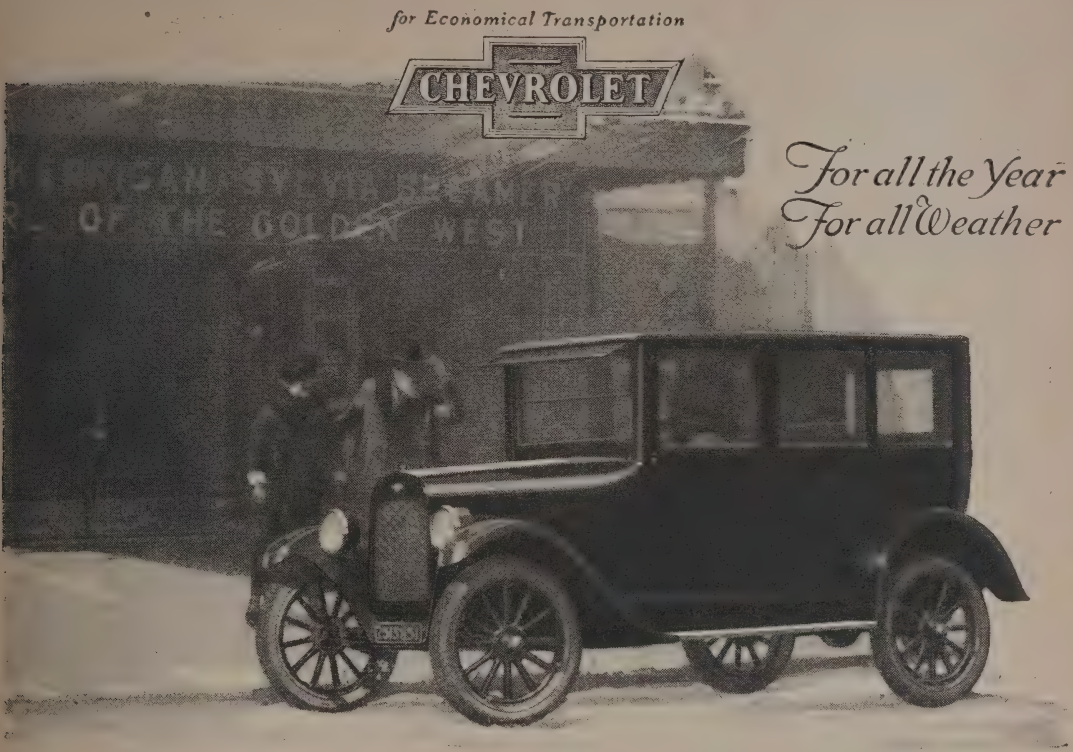
(*A letter from Mr. W. L. McGahan of Dallas, Texas.*)



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If a Jellyfish Could Slap a Rat in the Face

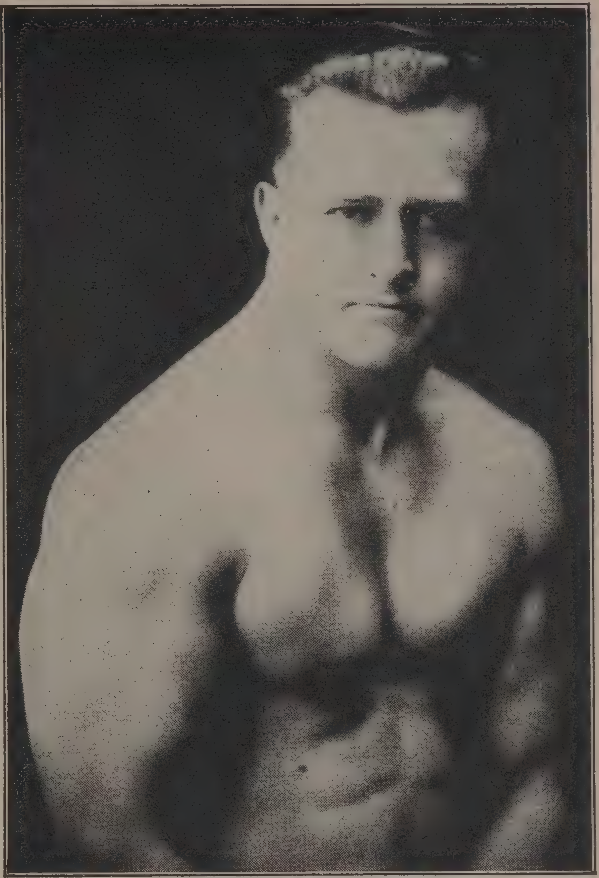
he would do it. But he can't. He has no arms. Neither does he have a backbone. How much worse off is a man who was given a good backbone and a pair of arms—and won't use them.

No Excuse

We excuse the jellyfish. He never had anything to work on. But there is no excuse for a flabby, round-shouldered and flat-chested specimen of a man. You were given a perfect framework for a body. You were meant to rule the world, but there is hardly an animal alive which does not show better sense than you do.

Cut It Out Fellows

Brace up and be the man you were meant to be. Don't try to imitate a jellyfish. Get some pep into you and make a real *He* man out of yourself. Come on and let me help you. I'll shoot a thrill into you that will make your old spine quiver with excitement. I'll build up that chest, broaden those shoulders and give you the huge, muscular arms of an athlete. And that's not all. Your lungs will start pumping real oxygen into your blood, purifying your entire system. Those old cobwebs in your brain will disappear. Your eyes will radiate the life within you. You will have a spring to your step, and every move you make will show new life and energy.



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Would you like to be a star salesman? Men who have mastered salesmanship—who are really proficient—name their own salaries. $5,000 to $10,000 a year and better not uncommon. Big money and opportunities in business always open to men who can SELL. Success in selling field leads to highest executive positions. Demand enormous. Old theory about "born salesman" exploded. Any man of average intelligence can now learn to sell thru scientific coaching. Training, the secret. Write today for free book, "MODERN SALESMANSHIP." It tells how you can quickly get into the selling game and win your way to the big-pay jobs. Learn in spare hours at home principles and methods of ablest sales organizations in America. Successful salesmen report sales doubled and trebled thru scientific study of salesmanship under LaSalle Problem Method. Low tuition fee—easy terms. Write now for information.

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The Largest Business Training Institution in the World
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Gentlemen: Send without obligation to me information regarding course indicated below:

☐ **Modern Salesmanship**

LaSalle is the largest business training institution in the world. It offers training for every important business need. If more interested in any of these courses, check here:

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Traffic Management—Foreign and Domestic
- ☐ Railway Station Management
- ☐ Law, Degree of LL. B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management Efficiency
- ☐ Banking and Finance
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
- ☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
- ☐ Personnel and Employment Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
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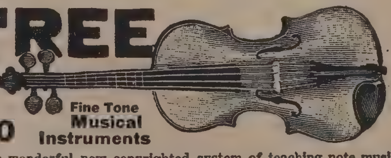
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching

Name..

Present Position..

Address..

FREE



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$20

We have a wonderful new copyrighted system of teaching note music by mail! To first pupils in each locality we will give free a $20 superb Violin, Tenor Banjo, Ukulele, Hawaiian-Guitar, Banjo, Mandolin, Banjo-Ukulele, Banjo-Mandolin, Cornet or Banjo-Guitar absolutely free. Also teach Piano and Organ. Very small charge for lessons only. Four lessons will teach you several pieces. Over 100,000 successful players. We guarantee success or no charge. Complete outfit free. Write today, Dept. 140. No obligation.

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She found a way to reduce her fat. It was a way far more pleasant than dieting or exercising would have been. This new way allowed her to eat foods without danger of becoming fat again.

She found *Marmola Prescription Tablets.* They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They help Nature to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

Marmola Prescription Tablets are made from the famous Marmola Prescription. Thousands have found that these handy tablets give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

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Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made self-adhesive purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone.** Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

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Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**

Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY.**

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Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao..........................

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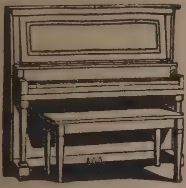

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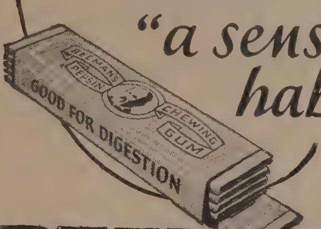
On a busy day Beeman's quiets the nerves and keeps you calm—its daily use is *"a sensible habit"*



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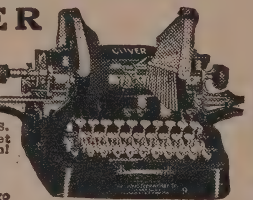

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BE COMFORTABLE—Wear the Brooks Appliance, the modern scientific invention which gives rupture sufferers immediate relief. It has no obnoxious springs or pads. Automatic Air Cushions bind and draw together the broken parts. No salves or plasters. Durable. Cheap. Sent on trial to prove its worth. Beware of imitations. Look for trade-mark bearing portrait and signature of C. E. Brooks which appears on every Appliance. None other genuine. Full information and booklet sent free in plain, sealed envelope.

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Not toys—but high-grade practical instruments for Symphony or Jazz orchestras. Great for solo work at Club, Lodge or Legion gatherings or home entertainments. Anyone can play with a few simple lessons, furnished with each instrument.

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$1,000 Cold Cash says I can clear your skin of the above blemishes.
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—At 27 Earns $4,500 a Year

"Three years ago," writes A. J. Klick, "I was just an average young man of 24, possessing a fair education, liking a good time, occupying a bookkeeper's high stool and receiving $1,100 per year.

"A crisis in my affairs woke me up and I began the serious study of Higher Accountancy.

"Before the year was over, I was making progress financially. Interested in my work, advancing steadily, by the time I had finished the course I had an executive position and $3,000 a year.

"This year I accepted a position as comptroller of a good sized corporation, with broader responsibilities and an initial salary of $4,500. The future years are full of promise."

Unusual Opportunities in Accounting

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Letter after letter in the files of LaSalle Extension University tells the same thrilling story of swift promotion thru home-study training. If the men now in low-pay jobs could see those actual letters, literally thousands of them, reporting advancement to positions paying $3,000, $5,000, and up to $10,000 a year, they would never rest until they had mastered the specialized training that they absolutely need to win success.

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Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One."

☐ ***Higher Accountancy***

Training for position as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.

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- ☐ Modern Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Railway Station Management
- ☐ Law—Degree of LL. B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management Efficiency
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
- ☐ Banking and Finance
- ☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
- ☐ Personnel and Employment Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
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- ☐ Commercial Spanish
- ☐ Effective Speaking
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Name..

Present Position....................................

Address..

He never knew why

ALMOST the first thing that greeted him on his return to town was a newspaper announcement telling him that the girl he had hoped to marry was engaged to another man.

This accounted for her silence during his absence—not a single letter all the time he was away.

And he never found the real reason why his courtship had been so complete a failure.

* * * *

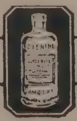
That's the insidious thing about halitosis (unpleasant breath). You, yourself, rarely know when you have it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle.

It halts food fermentation in the mouth and leaves the breath sweet, fresh and clean. So the systematic use of Listerine puts you on the safe and polite side.

Your druggist will supply you with Listerine. He sells lots of it. It has dozens of different uses as a safe antiseptic and has been trusted as such for a half a century. Read the interesting little booklet that comes with every bottle.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

For **HALITOSIS**



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"Sylvia" Diamond Ring
Blue white, radiant, perfect cut Diamond. The ring is 18-k solid White Gold
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Guaranteed to Pass Inspection

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Rectangular Wrist Watch
18-k White Gold, 17 Jewels, $29.75, 14-k, 15 Jewels, $24.85.
Yours for $3.00 down then **$1** a week until paid.

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17-Jewel ELGIN
No. 15—Green Gold, engraved, assorted patterns, guaranteed 25 years. 12 Size, gilt dial **$32**
Terms: $3.25 Down, then **$1.00** a Week.

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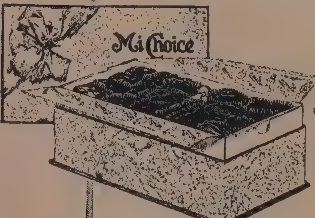
The Aristocrat of Chocolates

a selection of the most frequently chosen of all fine Bunte chocolates.



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Gray Hair Unnecessary

As I Have Proved

I proved it many years ago by restoring the original color to my own prematurely gray hair with the same Restorer I now offer you. This time-tested preparation never fails, as hundreds of thousands of gray haired people since have learned.

There is not space in this advertisement to tell my story. Send for Free Trial bottle and learn all.

Trial Bottle Absolutely FREE

Mary T. Goldman's Hair Color Restorer is a clear, colorless liquid, clean as water. No greasy sediment to make your hair sticky and stringy, nothing to wash or rub off. Application easy, restored color perfect, in any light. Faded or discolored hair just as surely and safely restored as hair naturally gray.

MAIL COUPON TODAY for special patented Free Trial and full instructions for making the convincing test on one lock. If possible, enclose lock of your hair in your letter.

FREE TRIAL COUPON

Please print your name and address

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Please send your patented Free Trial Outfit. X shows color of hair. Black...... dark brown...... medium brown...... auburn (dark red)...... light brown...... light auburn (light red)...... blonde......

Name ....

Street.................................... *City*..........................

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The shoe that won't run over.

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Try-ons cost nothing.

And you'll find a Crawford shoe that'll just fill the bill for *you*—dress, street or sports wear.

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New Auto Map only 10¢

WE have made a special arrangement with Rand, McNally & Co., famous map makers, by which we can offer you, for a brief period, any of their official Auto Trail Maps for only 10c apiece. This series covers every state and gives all kinds of valuable information—Trail Signs; Best Hotels; Garages; Service Stations; etc. strictly up to date. Size 28½ x 34 inches, folded into strong covers, pocket size. Send 10c and address of the shop that usually relines your brakes, and we will send you a map of any state or section you ask for, together with complete list of all the maps. This offer is strictly limited, so order at once.

Multibestos Prepares You For Every Touring Emergency

The above offer is made frankly to acquaint you with Multibestos, the Brake Lining with the Interlocking Weave. This brake lining, which is specified as factory equipment by a majority of American car makers, is famous for the *long time it lasts*. Ask for Multibestos by name the next time your brakes need relining.

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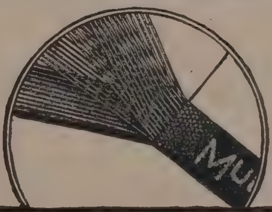
MULTIBESTOS
THE BRAKE LINING
with the Interlocking Weave



Special Offer to Introduce Our Cut Glass:

$1 Buys Both

these Cut Glass pieces

Just think—this handsome footed cut glass bowl, 6 in. across, and this nice covered marmalade jar, 4 in. high, both for only $1! You can't let this bargain slip by. Send $1, money order or check. If west of the Miss. add 20c postage. We guarantee prompt, safe delivery. Money back if you are not delighted.

Dept. MG **Krystal Krafters** Trenton, N.J.

Are you the lucky one in five?

Not if your gums bleed easily Check Pyorrhea with Forhan's

Pyorrhea, destroyer of teeth and health, plays no favorites. Dental records show that four persons out of every five past 40, and thousands younger, too, are Pyorrhea's victims.

Heed Nature's warning—tender, bleeding gums—before it is too late. Better still, stop Pyorrhea before it strikes by regular visits to your dentist and by brushing your teeth twice daily with Forhan's For the Gums.

At all druggists, 35c and 60c.

Forhan's

FOR THE GUMS

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Do you want an important, high-salaried position? You can have one if you can do the work. LaSalle experts will show you how, guide you step by step to success and help solve your personal business problems. Our plan enables you to train during spare hours without interference with your present duties. Give us your name and address and mark with an X below the kind of position you want to fill. We will mail catalog and full particulars regarding our low cost monthly payment plan. Also our valuable book for ambitious men, "Ten Years' Promotion in One." Tear out, mark and mail the coupon today. No obligation to you. Find out about the new "LaSalle Problem Method," what it is and how it works. Let us prove to you how this step has helped thousands of ambitious men to real success. Check and mail the coupon now.

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- ☐ Business Management
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- ☐ Railway Station Management
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- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management Efficiency
- ☐ Banking and Finance
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
- ☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
- ☐ Personnel and Employment Management
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Present Position..

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A practical forty-lesson course in the writing and marketing of the Short-Story, taught by Dr. J. Berg Esenwein, famous critic and teacher; Editor of The Writer's Monthly.

One pupil has earned over $5,000 writing in his spare time—hundreds are selling constantly to the leading publishers.

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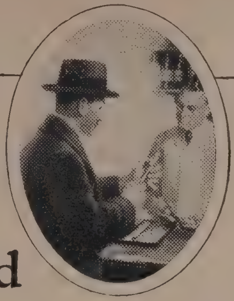


A very bad habit is eliminated by this remarkable new tooth brush

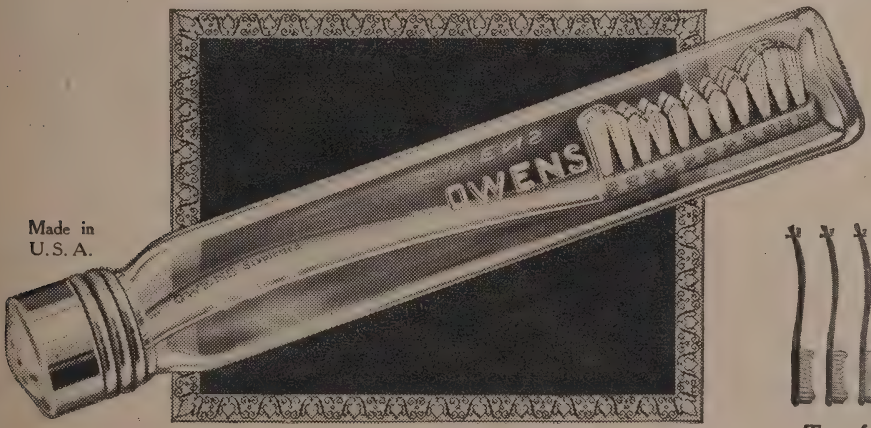
TOOTH brushes are often exposed to the most careless, dangerous handling. Many people even have the thoughtless habit of testing the bristles with their fingers—forgetful of the fact that fingers often carry infection or dirt.

The Owens Staple tied Tooth Brush is protected from this dangerous habit. It is the only tooth brush that may be seen without unsanitary handling. Each one is sold in a clean, transparent glass container. Exposed to the eye, but not to thumbing or dirt.

Every feature of the Owens represents a remarkable improvement! It is made of the highest quality materials that can be bought. A wonderful new machine ties each bristle tuft permanently into the handle with a hidden staple. Bristles won't come out.

You'll be delighted with the design! The brush is small and shaped to the teeth. Bristles are wedge-shaped and spaced wide apart. The handle is softly curved to make correct brushing easier.

No other tooth brush can bring you all these advantages. Yet the Owens—improved in every way and sold in the glass container—costs no more than ordinary tooth brushes. 30, 40 and 50 cents each in child's, youth's and adult's sizes. *See* it at your druggist's.



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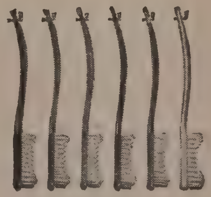

Two features you'll like

Handles are made in six different colors, red, blue, amber, green, purple and white. One for each member of your family. The clean glass container makes a convenient holder when traveling.

OWENS

***Staple tied* TOOTH BRUSH**

THE OWENS BOTTLE COMPANY, TOLEDO

If your rheumatism comes on again this year—

How can a medicine that is applied on the outside of the skin reach a pain deep down in the joints and muscles? This treatment acts by stimulating the brain to send new blood to the affected area

DON'T suffer unnecessary pain. Get relief at once. It may be splendidly courageous to just "grin and bear it"—but it is a frightful waste of the very vital resources you need to help you get rid of the cause of the pain.

Your doctor will tell you that pain should always be relieved—just as quickly and as completely as possible.

And this relief is easily at hand. However deep-seated, however hard to reach the pain may seem to you, it can be stopped—quickly and permanently.

Nearly fifty years ago a remedy for muscular pain was given to the world that has brought relief to so many sufferers that today you will find it in one home out of every three.

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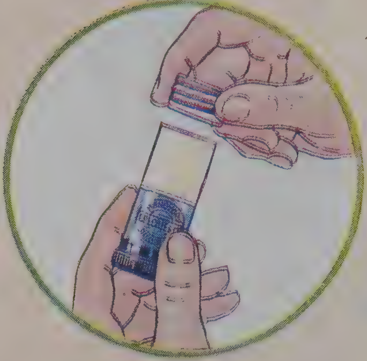

Economy

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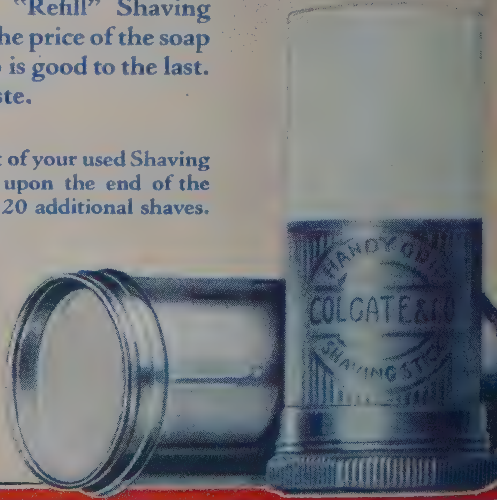

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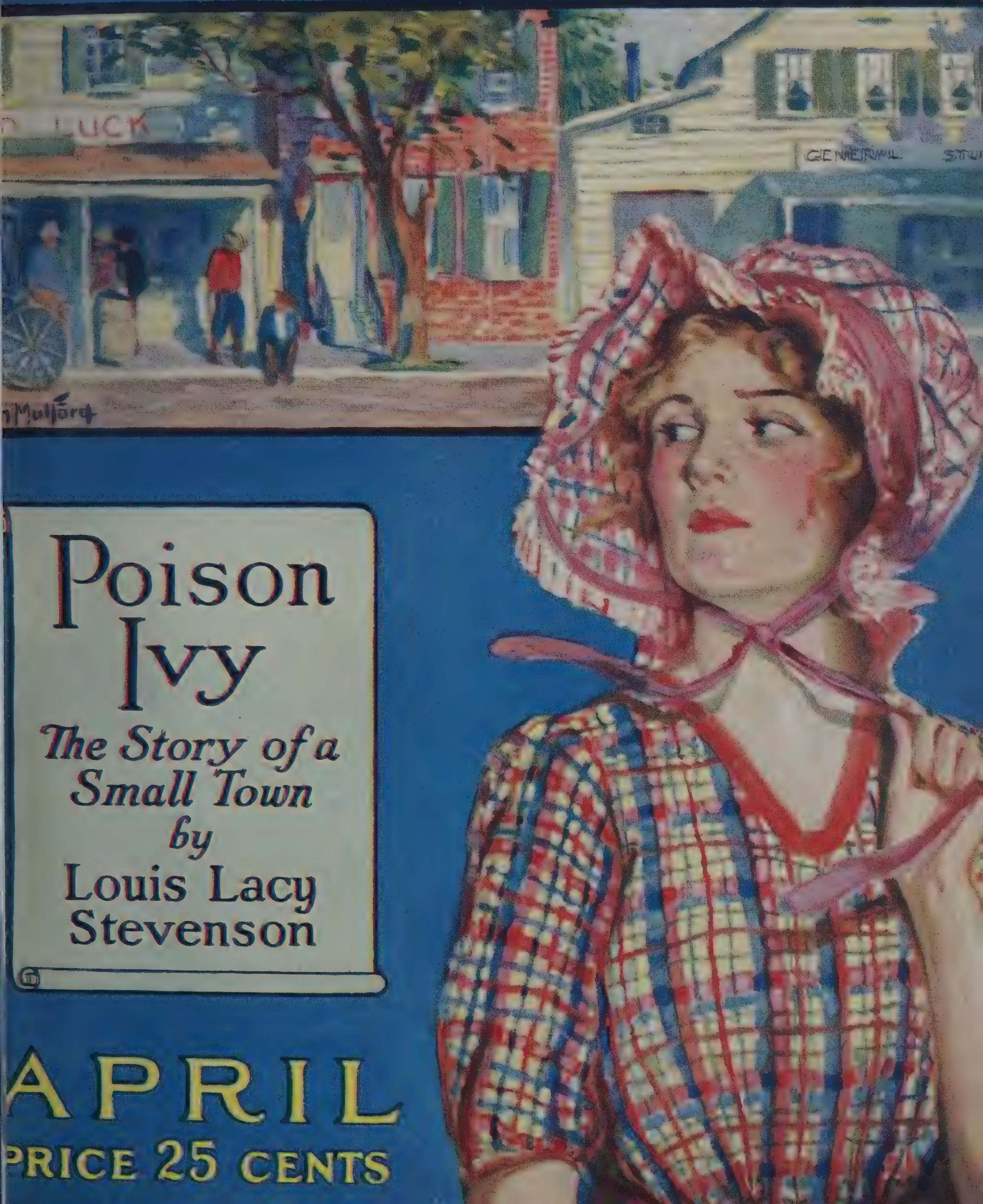

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The Story of a Small Town

by

Louis Lacy Stevenson

APRIL

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GENERAL ELECTRIC

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

CONTENTS FOR APRIL 1924

VOL. LXXXI NUMBER 3

Serial Stories

POISON IVY (Chapters I-VIII) . . . . . . Louis Lacy Stevenson 416
SUSPICION (Chapters VIII-XIII) . . . . Reita Lambert 462
THE TWISTED FOOT (Chapters XVI-XXIII) . William Patterson White 492
THE TOKEN (Chapters XIX-XXIII) . . . . Louis Tracy 533
THE BULLFIGHTER (Chapters XXV-XXIX) . . . . T. S Stribling 565

Short Stories and Novelette

Riders of the Hidden Trail (Novelette) . . . . Charles Wesley Sanders 385
The Discovery . . . . Leighton Osmun 439
Mary . . . . John Scarry 447
His Remarkable Future . . . . Elisabeth Sanxay Holding 453
The Reclamation of Jack Birmingham . . . . . Lily A Long 483
A Life Line for Harriet . . . . Margaret Busbee Shipp 487
Saul the Fifth . . . . Mella Russell McCallum 519
The Look . . . . Rosa Aubrey Wood 528
Homelike Delicatessen . . . . Ralph E. Mooney 549
Never Go Back to Say Good-By . . . . . . George F. Worts 560

Poems

Ballade of the Living Face . Richard Le Gallienne 415
Let's Go Away! . . . . Malcolm Douglas 438
Heaven on Earth . . . . Anita Dudley 446
Blue Worlds . . . . Mary Louise Mabie 452
Youth's Triumph . . . . . Harry Kemp 461
A Peddler Cries in the City . Charles Divine 491
The Wayside Garden . . Clinton Scollard 527
At Midway House . William Wallace Whitelock 532
The Prisoner . . Roselle Mercier Montgomery 559
The Motor Ship . . . Kathryn White Ryan 564
Compensation . . . Charles Hanson Towne 576

THE MAY MUNSEY (on sale Saturday, April 19) will contain two features of special interest—" Beyond the Pole," by Philip M. Fisher, a complete novelette which tells the strange story of an aircraft expedition into the arctic, and the opening chapters of " The Discard," by Kenneth Perkins, a stirring tale of romance and adventure in a picturesque corner of India

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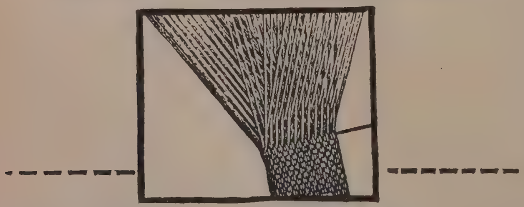

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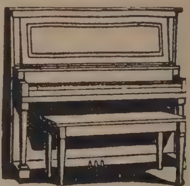

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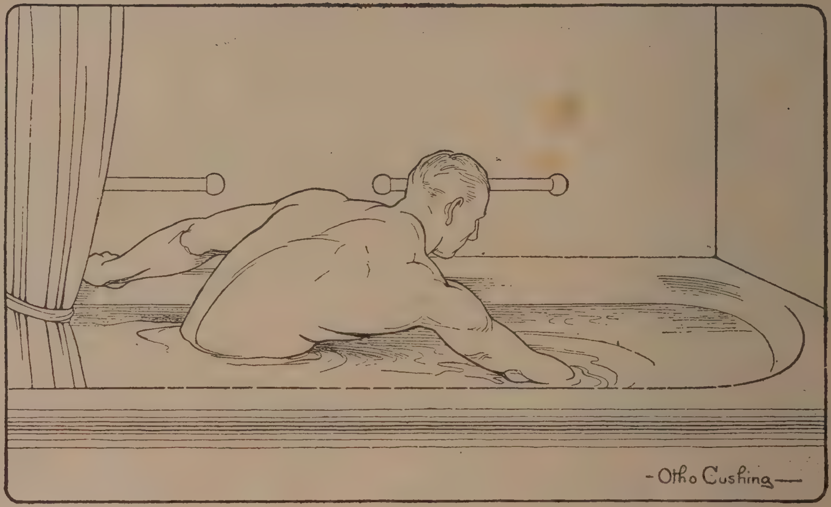

We sometimes still hear of a man who tries to bathe with a soap that has all the diving properties of a ship's anchor.

The fact is, sinker soaps went out of fashion for the bath with tin tubs and the one-horse shay.

The Ivory non-sink principle is simple and incontestible. Therefore it is both modern and permanent. Is it desirable that your bath soap should conceal itself, like a furtive trout, in some dark corner of the tub-bottom? No. Very well, that is why Ivory Soap floats.

Ivoryless men are handicapped in other ways, too. For instance, they cannot yet have learned the truth about real lather. Ivory lather differs from most lather as a fleecy summer cloud from a November fog.

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MUNSEY'S
MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1924

Vol. LXXXI NUMBER 3

Riders of the Hidden Trail

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—THE STORY OF AN EVENTFUL NIGHT IN THE LIFE OF THOMAS KANE, FORMERLY DEPUTY SHERIFF

By Charles Wesley Sanders

THOMAS KANE, late deputy sheriff, sat on the porch of his new bungalow, completed two months ago, and regarded nature in her sunny mood.

It was high noon, and the Oklahoma sun was blazing overhead; but Thomas Kane was not suffering from the heat. Five feet from him an electric fan revolved with a whirring, soothing sound. On a nearer table was a pitcher of lemonade. The pitcher was half full of ice, and its sides were temptingly frosted. In Kane's mouth was a long cigar, purchased at a cost of fifty cents. His feet were on the rail of the porch. He was comfortably slumped down in a chair which had a thick cushion on back and seat, and which was further equipped with heavy steel springs.

Clambering up the porch on all sides were red roses in full bloom. Their fragrance came pleasingly to Kane's nostrils. He was enjoying a fine rest.

Up to a year ago Kane had led a hard life. As deputy sheriff, he had had to poke his nose into countless dangerous places. He carried a number of scars to remind him of occasions when he and death had cast the dice to see who could make his point first. Then Mr. Kane had made money in oil, as so many other people were doing in Oklahoma, and he turned in his badge and retired, to take his ease with his beautiful young wife.

After the acquisition of his tidy wad of bank notes, Kane had had one of the prettiest romances that a man could hope for, surpassing his dreams by at least a hundred per cent. A moment more, and that romance can be touched upon, explanation being necessary in order to make the situation clear.

Here we must pause to listen, with Kane, to the ringing of the telephone in the living room. At the same instant we catch the sound of Mrs. Kane's footsteps descending the stairs. Comes her voice—soft, sweet music to the ears of Kane.

"Never mind, honey!" she called. "Don't stir! I'm right here. I'll answer the phone."

Kane settled back with a grunt of contentment and took a long, hard pull on his cigar. It seemed as if his wife was always right there when anything was needed. It seemed as if she lay in wait to do things like this, so that the comfort of her beloved husband should know no interruption.

Not that Kane wished her to wait on him. First and last, he took more steps for her than she took for him. Between them, things flowed on an easy current in the Kane home. Kane always thought she was doing more for him than he for her, and she thought otherwise; and so there was no dispute about it.

Now, Bessie Kane had a profound appreciation of the ease and comfort and pleasure with which Kane had surrounded her. Like so many American girls, she had been swift to adapt herself to a new environment. Her manners were those of a lady. This was not exactly a new development, for she had always known what good manners were; but heretofore she had had little occasion to use them, and sometimes she had been too tired to do so. A weary round from hall bedroom to uninteresting place of employment will blunt the social graces of even the most fastidious; but what was instinctive with Bessie flowered in her new surroundings, as the roses flower in that sun-bathed land.

When she took down the receiver, she didn't say "Hello," leaving the person at the other end of the wire to inquire whether he had got the right number. In her smooth, even, dulcet voice she said:

"Thomas Kane's residence."

There the caller-up was, all connected and informed, so that he could shoot right along with his talk.

Apparently the present caller-up was a person of exceedingly few words, for an instant after she had made her announcement she set the receiver on the little phone table and came to the screen door.

"Somebody wants you, honey," she said. "Sorry to disturb you."

"Yes, it's a terrible thing!" said Thomas Kane, a humorous smile twisting his lips. "I'm so feeble that I dunno if I can get to that phone!"

He laid a hand on his wife's shoulder as he passed through the door, and they smiled confidently into each other's eyes. They were much to each other, these two, for both of them had come out of the shadows of life into the sunshine, and they were naturally appreciative. They believed in each other as thoroughly as man or woman ever believed in anything in a world full of sound and fury.

Kane walked over to the phone and picked it up. His wife listened, for no secrets lay between them.

She gathered little from what Kane said. His conversation was limited to exactly five "yehs," briskly spoken. Then he said:

"I'll be right on the job, old boy!" He hung up the receiver. "Just a minute, Bessie," he added, turning to his wife.

He swept to the stairs and bounded up them, two steps at a time. Bessie's big brown eyes followed him till he disappeared. She heard him move across an upper room and open a dresser drawer. The dresser was new, and that top drawer always squeaked a little.

Dread came into the heart of Thomas Kane's wife. It had been born there because of two things. One was the look in her husband's eyes as he put down the phone. The soft, lazy look had suddenly died in them, and they flashed with a hard brilliance.

The other thing was the fact that he had called her Bessie. She couldn't remember that he had done that since they were married, except in the presence of others. He always "honeyed" her and "deared" her in a fashion that might have made cynical people laugh.

Bessie's alarm became actual terror as Kane returned down the stairs. He was putting on his gun belt. It was heavily laden with cartridges, and there was a six-shooter in each holster. The holsters had open tops, and the butts of the big guns protruded with ugly significance.

The flashing brilliance had died out of his eyes, and they were set, cold, determined. Bessie had never seen that look in them before. Her husband had told her many tales of the dangers he had passed—he and other men—and she had shivered and been grateful that he had to face such perils no more. She knew, instantly, that amid those dangers his face had had the look that it had now.

His nostrils—which were large even in repose — were a little dilated. His wide mouth was locked till lips ordinarily rather full were a mere line. His red blood burned under his tan—which his face had kept because he still spent many hours in the sun, riding about the country with his wife.

Bessie backed to a table, put her hands behind her, and rested her palms on the table top. Her bosom was rising and falling swiftly. Her eyes were wide as she stared at her husband.

Kane finished fastening his belt. He raised his eyes to his wife's face, and they grew suddenly gentle. He crossed over to her.

" Honey," he said, taking her hands, and finding them cold, " I've got to leave you for a while. I've got to ride out and meet the sheriff and a posse, and give them a hand in catching a man who has escaped from the penitentiary. He got away night before last, when it stormed so hard, and the lights went out. He sneaked away right under the guards in their towers, and they couldn't see him. I won't be gone long, honey."

He leaned to kiss her. For the first time since their initial kiss, when Kane had asked her to marry him, she drew back.

" Who is the man?" she whispered.

" Fellow named Shartel, so the sheriff says," Kane answered.

" What was he in the penitentiary for?" Bessie asked.

Heretofore Kane had delighted in his wife's penetration. He had called her " the knowingest woman in the world." Sometimes she seemed able to guess his thoughts before he put them into words. She couldn't have asked a more disquieting question just now, however.

" Oh, he'd been sent up for something or other," Kane evaded.

" For what?"

" Well, it was for murder, Bessie. He was doing a life term."

" Who was it he killed?"

" It was three years ago," Kane sighed. " He had been drinking bad liquor, and he killed a woman and—and a little girl. He went riding down the road in a rag town, and just shot two innocent folks to death. He had served a term for robbery, and had been up on a murder charge before, but got free somehow. He's no good. Can't be allowed to be at large. Might shoot anybody. The only way to stop him is for us fellows to comb the countryside and nab him."

" How does the sheriff know he's in this country?" she asked.

" He was seen getting off a freight train two miles east. Fellows that saw him had been at his trial. They were afraid to tackle him, because he'd stolen a couple of guns some place, and they were unarmed. This morning, just before dawn, he stole a horse and made for the hills. He's hiding in them some place now."

" You men will go into the hills and hunt him," said Bessie. " You'll be separated. You'll never think of the risk, Tom. You may come on him in hiding, and he may fire on you before you—"

Her voice trailed off. Kane managed to laugh.

" Why, honey," he said, " I've been through this business a hundred times, and I've lived to be blessed by having you for a wife. There's no real danger. Honest, I don't want to brag, but there isn't an outlaw in this State that can get me, when once I pick up his trail. I'll be careful. I must go, honey. The sheriff and the boys are waiting over at Joe Dawson's, and they won't wait long. If I don't show up in half an hour, they will take to the hills without me. The sheriff picks his men, and it's an honor to be picked. He won't wait for any man, though."

" You say there's no danger," Bessie said dully. " You say that, after what you've told me about man hunts in the past. There was the time when a bullet went through your hat and clipped your hair. There is that scar where a bullet plowed across your chest. If you had been facing the other way, you would have been shot through the heart. And there were other times as perilous as those; yet you tell *me* that there is no danger!"

" Well, I'll take that back," Kane said slowly. " Shouldn't have said it. Course there's danger—plenty of it. If I have to say it myself, that's why the sheriff called on me and some of the other boys. He knows my ways. He knows he can always depend on me."

" He knows that you will go into places where few men would care to go," Bessie said. " He knows that you will not think of the danger to yourself. He knows that if you have to risk your life to get this killer, you will do it. That's why he has called you!"

"All the other boys he has collected will be ready to do the same thing," Kane said. "They're all game, they can shoot, and they won't think of anything but getting this fellow locked up again. He's a danger to the community, Bessie."

"The sheriff and his posse will undoubtedly get the man," Bessie said. "They will have just that one idea; but—but the chances are very good that before night some members of that posse will be carried out of the hills, and will never hunt a man again. Isn't that true?"

Kane looked deeply into the eyes of his wife. The thing she described might happen to him. She might never see him alive again. That would be a terrible thing for her. He couldn't leave her with a lie on his lips, even if the lie was designed to give her temporary peace.

"Why, yes—I reckon that's true, Bessie," he said.

She drew her hands from his clasp and put them on his shoulders. Her long fingers dug into his flesh beneath his shirt. The eyes of his beloved wife entreated him.

"You're not going!" she said. "I can't stand it! If anything should happen to you, I'd—I'd—I don't know what I'd do. We've been so happy here, and it's the first real happiness for either of us. You've done your duty by the community in the past. You've risked your life again and again. Let some one else take your place this time—just this time! I can't bear it, Tom! I can't bear to have our happiness broken up. You can call me a coward if you want to, and I know I am a coward; but you mustn't go on this man hunt. You simply mustn't!"

Kane opened his lips to speak, but before he could command tardy words his wife circled his neck with her arms and laid her head on his breast. Sobs shook her. Kane would not have suffered more keenly if some one had thrust a knife into his heart and twisted it there.

"Honey, honey!" he whispered. "Don't do that! *I* can't stand *that!*"

The storm of her sobbing only increased in violence. Kane unclasped her arms and put her away from him. She stood back against the table, her face uncovered, tears streaming down it.

"Don't cry," the former deputy entreated. "I'm not going. I'll let the other boys have a chance at this game. See, I'm taking off my belt, honey!"

He unfastened the belt, and, with the guns still in the holsters, laid it on the table.

"There!" he said. "That settles that. In a few minutes the sheriff will hit the hills without me. I guess he'll have enough help."

Kane's voice was low, and there was a listless sag to his shoulders. He half turned, so that his wife should not see his face. He felt as if his face had taken on an aged, haggard look. For the first time in his life he had heard the call and had failed to answer it.

His wife dabbed away her tears with her handkerchief, and fought for composure.

"I'll hurry lunch," she said. "I'll make it as nice as I can."

With face still averted, Kane walked to the door. The listless sag of his shoulders was emphasized.

"I guess I don't want any lunch," he said. "I'm not feeling up to food just now. I'll go out and visit with the horse, and see how he's getting along."

"You—you won't saddle him and ride away?" she questioned.

Kane swept his arm toward the table.

"There are my guns," he said. "A man doesn't ride on an errand like that unless he has his guns with him." He smiled a queer, crooked smile. "There will be men up in the hills presently," he said, "and there will be some shooting. They'll get that outlaw, those *men* will, even if they have to contribute some of their number; but I won't be there. No, I'll be safe in my snug nest, while men that have followed me in the past go out and attend to that little job!"

Still smiling his crooked smile, he opened the door and went out on the porch. Bessie heard him descend the steps. With bitterness in his heart he was leaving her to seek his horse, companion on many a dangerous ride.

Mrs. Thomas Kane wept no more. She rested her locked hands on the table in front of her, and stared at the wall with unseeing eyes.

"Coward!" she said at last, accusingly. "You're not fit to be his wife!"

She half rose, as if she would follow him and send him riding into the peril that the hills held. Then she dropped back into her seat and stared anew.

"I can't do it!" she whispered. "I can see him wounded, bleeding, dying, dead.

It would be too much. I couldn't possibly bear it!"

She twisted her interlocked fingers and stared and stared.

II

Bessie had worked as cashier in the so-called coffeeroom of a hotel in a big Eastern city. When Thomas Kane, for the first time in his life, found himself with money to spend, he went to that city to have a look-see. He had never been out of the Oklahoma county in which he had been born. Of course, he read the newspapers, and he knew that there were mammoth towns between his village and the Atlantic Ocean. He wanted to see one of those towns.

The big town did not bewilder him as much as one might have thought. Even in his own village there were automobiles a-plenty, and a single street car line. Sometimes, on a Saturday night, a man would have to run across the street to get through the traffic safely. Crossing the city streets, therefore, did not bother Kane much. In fact, the traffic policemen made it easier to get across than it sometimes was back home.

The sidewalks were always crowded, but, for that matter, the village sidewalks were crowded on Saturday nights. It was no new sensation for Kane to edge his way through a crowd. The big town had theaters and movie houses in countless numbers; but the village had two, and Kane noticed familiar names on the signs in front of the city places. The hotel at which he stopped was no finer than the new hotel back home—a hotel built from oil money, which meant that it was built regardless of expense.

On the evening of his first day, Kane began to find the city rather monotonous. He wished that he was on the back of a good horse in the open country. A rush of wind would have perked him up. He didn't think the air in the city was especially good. It was heavy, and it had too much smoke in it. He began to think of returning home, though he had originally planned a ten-day vacation.

Then, the next morning, he saw Bessie. He hadn't noticed the coffeeroom tucked off the lobby of the hotel until he came down in the elevator, hungry as the proverbial bear. He reckoned he would try the coffeeroom.

Leaving his key at the desk, he walked through the door. He ate heartily, and looked around for a cigar stand, where he could replenish his supply of "makings." He didn't find the cigar stand — but he found Bessie.

Bessie was perched on a stool in front of the street window. She was behind a desk, and at her right hand was a cash register. Kane's eyesight was particularly good, and down the length of the room he viewed the girl. To him, she was a young goddess on a pedestal. He saw brown hair, brown eyes, a satiny skin, red lips, and a white throat above a white dress.

Thomas Kane picked up his check, took his hat off the hook, and went briskly the length of the room and up to the desk. He put a five-dollar bill on top of the check, and pushed check and bill toward the girl. She made his change without looking at him.

"Looks like it's going to be hot again to-day, ma'am," he said.

Perhaps there was a different quality in his voice. Anyhow, she looked at him. It cannot be doubted that a snappy retort rose to her lips, for every day she had to squelch would-be mashers. Perhaps there was something different in the looks of this man from the West. Anyhow, she did not utter the snappy retort. Her eyes ran over Kane's lean, brown, unsmiling face. Her color deepened just perceptibly.

"Yes," she said in a low voice. "It's going to be hot."

Thomas left the coffeeroom. He would be back for lunch, he knew; but before the hour of twelve he had twice returned to eat pie and drink coffee at the counter. Each time he paid his check he addressed a remark to Bessie, but he did not smile. Each time Bessie gave him a low, grave response, and searched his lean countenance. She found nothing but sincerity in it.

'Twas thus at noon. 'Twas thus at night; and then upspoke the Westerner.

"Would you care to go to a show with me to-night?" he said. "Any place you pick will suit me."

She made his change slowly. There was a little pucker between her eyes. She counted out the money with her eyes only on it. Then she looked out through the window.

"I'd rather go to a park, where it will be cool and quiet," she said.

"Why, that's fine!" replied Kane. "I thought perhaps a show would suit you better. If there's a big park lying around handy, that's the place for me. What time do you get through?"

"In five minutes."

"I'll be right outside," said Thomas.

He suggested a cab. He had seen a line of cabs at the side entrance. She appeared to debate the matter.

"We'll take a street car," she said.

In the park they found a bench. From the bench they could see the lake. A silver moon came up. Thomas told his name; she told hers. He told her where he came from; she said she had always lived in the city.

Thomas, bewitched, but keeping his head, bet his stack then. He told her about his horses. Like *Othello,* he related hair-raising adventures. He was all alone in the world, he said, and it was about time he settled down. He had four oil wells on his place, and was going to drill more. He would keep about ten acres on the corner, and build a bungalow. He would have a couple of cars, if anybody around the place wanted them. For himself, he preferred a horse. His income was about two hundred dollars a day just now.

Bessie coughed, and laughed a throaty, little laugh.

"It's a fine moon, isn't it?" she said.

Thomas had not the slightest interest in the moon. He was looking at her lifted profile, her square little chin, her wavy brown hair, the line of her smooth throat. Cupid, somewhere among the trees, never made a better shot. Thomas had been wounded when he looked at her in the restaurant; now he was shot plumb through the heart. He was lost to the world of bachelors, if he could persuade the lady.

"I'd like to have you for a partner," he said. "I'll take you back to my country and make a queen of you."

Bessie continued to look at the moon.

"I make fifteen dollars a week in the coffeeroom," she said. "I sleep in a room with one window in it. There is space for me, if I crowd myself, and for three pieces of furniture. I have to dress like a lady. I save three dollars a week. I have ninety-nine dollars in the bank now. This is the best job I ever had. I've had it thirty-three weeks. I think I had better keep it. Let's get a street car!"

She rose. Thomas Kane did not rise.

"You think I'm lying to you, don't you?" he asked.

"Well, a man with that income *might* wear a twenty-five-dollar suit right off the shelf and a fifty-cent necktie, ready made. Some people are peculiar. Let's go!"

"I've never been very strong on clothes," Kane said. "I just went into a store back home and bought this outfit I'm wearing. I can prove to you that what I've told you is true."

"If you have an income of two hundred dollars a day, you don't want to marry a working girl," she said. "You can go to Europe and pick yourself a princess."

"Sit down!"

That was the tone Thomas had often used when he had ordered a bad actor to "stick 'em up." The girl looked at him in astonishment. What did he mean, talking to her in that tone?

She saw a strange look in his eyes. It was such a straightforward look as the girl was not accustomed to. She sat down.

Kane had never known that there was eloquence in him, but now he seemed to tap a reserve supply somewhere. Bessie confessed afterward that his words thrilled her like an old song or a well remembered tale of high romance, but then she was not a competent witness.

"I'm not trying to bribe you, girl," said Kane, almost severely; "but I have lived close myself, and I know that a wad of money coming in is a mighty enjoyable thing. I wouldn't have spoken to you this way if I hadn't the money to make things easy and pleasant for you."

He paused, and his eyes followed hers to the moon. He wanted to say the three most potent words in any language, but, dog-gone it, it was hard to get them out! He had always considered that a man who talked like that had gone completely soft. However, he got out the words at last, and added thickly:

"Will you marry me, Bessie?"

She interlocked her fingers—a habit she had in times of stress. For a space she sat like a statue. Then she said, in a voice that trembled:

"How long are you going to be in town?"

"Till I get the proper answer from you."

That was an inspired statement. Bessie drew a long, slow breath.

"Take me home now," she said. "I'll see you to-morrow night."

He took her home, and stood with her in front of the brick house in which she had that uninviting room. Other houses leaned up close. The street was narrow, the air was thick, and there was no breeze.

"A pretty hard place to live," said Kane. "Let me take you out of it!"

He looked down at her, hat in hand. She searched his face for a long time. Then, suddenly, twin tears welled up in her brown eyes, hung there for a moment, and rolled out on her cheeks.

Thomas Kane clenched and unclenched his hands once. He reached out his arms.

Three days later he took Bessie back to Oklahoma with him. He set aside a small acreage, a little reservation upon which the drillers would never encroach. He bought two automobiles. He built a neat bungalow for a home. Apparently there wasn't a cloud in the sky of Thomas and Bessie Kane's happiness.

And now Bessie was sitting staring at the wall with unseeing eyes, and Thomas was out in the new barn. He was standing by a mare brought in out of the heat. He was fond of the mare. She was his favorite horse; but it was well enough that his wife did not hear the words that he addressed to the sleek animal. They were strong words, lacking elegance.

III

The new bungalow was a house of gloom that afternoon. Supper was a silent meal. Thomas Kane kept his eyes on his plate, and ate little. After a couple of apprehensive glances at her husband, Bessie dropped her own eyes. She ate even less than he did.

After supper Thomas went out on the porch and lighted one of his expensive cigars. He smoked fast and furiously. Presently he lighted another cigar against the tip of the first. He threw the butt away with an angry gesture.

Slumping down in his chair, he looked at the moon, but the moon held no interest for him. It was just a moon. It had been shining for a long time, and would continue to shine long after Thomas Kane had died in his bed, like an invalid or a very old man. He would never plunge from a saddle and die with his boots on. He was "hobbled good."

He got to wondering how the posse was faring. They ought to have bagged their man by now. It was about eight hours since the sheriff had called Kane. Single-handed, Thomas had run down an outlaw in less than eight hours.

He rose and went into the sitting room, switching on the light. He had not known that Bessie was in the room. He had not even wondered where she was. He saw her curled up on the davenport. She lifted her head quickly, blinking against the light.

"Is there anything I can do for you, dear?" she asked.

"Who? Me?" said Kane, grouchily. "Reckon not, unless you get me a nurse, or have a guardian appointed for me!"

Bessie lay back on the davenport. Kane took up the telephone. He called the sheriff's office.

"That you, Bill?" he asked. "Oh, you, Buck! Say, you heard anything from the boys that went after that Shartel fellow? Not a thing, eh? Yes, it's me—Kane. No, I'm not sick. We-e-ell, I didn't go—couldn't make the riffle. Let me know when you hear anything."

He jammed the receiver on the hook, rose, and strode to the door. His face was white, and his teeth were sunk deep into his cigar.

"Wh-what did he say?" asked Bessie.

"That was the deputy that has charge of the jail," Kane answered, and a thin, bitter smile curled his lips. "He was just asking me why I didn't hit the trail with the sheriff. Wanted to know was I sick. Me, sick! His voice gave me a hint as to how he was looking at the matter. He knew the sheriff called for me, and here am I calling up to find out if that fellow has been caught!" He kicked open the screen door. "Blank, blank!" he burst out. "It's sickening!"

"You needn't swear," his wife said coldly.

"Swear?" Kane repeated. "If you call that swearing, you should have been out to the barn to-day. You'd have heard some *language* then!"

"Oh, I suppose you would rather be with that sweating, cursing, hard-riding, killing crew than safe home here with me," his wife said.

"You're damned well right," said Kane.

Bessie covered her ears. Kane went back to his seat.

He was on his fourth cigar when there was a clatter of hoofs on the cemented drive that wound up to the porch from the dirt road below. Kane glimpsed a lathered horse with a stocky man astride it. The horse came to a whirling stop just below Kane.

"Hello, inside!" the rider called.

"I'm right here, sheriff," Kane said, rising. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh, you're right there, are you?" Sheriff Ledbetter asked. "Well, I'd like to know what in the blank blank you're doing right there! Sitting on top of the world, smoking a long cigar, hey, when me and the rest of the boys are riding these condemned hills looking for that escaped prisoner! You told me on the phone that you would be right with me. I only had four men. I was depending on you, Kane; and now here I am with a bullet through my shoulder, and forced to quit. The boys are pegging after that fellow, and they'll get him before dawn. He poked a bullet into me when I tried to rush him an hour ago. What's the matter with you, Kane? I just stopped to see. Have you lost your nerve since you married the soft-handed lady from the East? Are you a man any more, or are you one of these here lounge lizards I've been reading about in the papers? Maybe you got an infection when you were sporting around in the big town."

Kane saw that Ledbetter was very angry. The sheriff, off his job, was a pleasant, mild-mannered man, a lover of peace. Now, having been disappointed by the best man hunter he had summoned, and having got a bullet in his shoulder, forcing him to quit the chase, he was so bitter that he forgot himself in his description of Kane's wife.

For eight hours Kane had been a sufferer from about all the evil emotions known to man. He had felt scorn and hate and bitter anger and resentment. He had even whispered in his heart that Bessie was no sort of wife for a man like himself. At the first hint of danger she had been—well, yellow, if he had to say it.

Kane might think such thoughts himself, but he would allow no other man to think anything similar, much less to give voice to it. He rose swiftly from his chair and descended to Ledbetter's side.

"What you've said about me can ride as it is," he said harshly, lifting flaming eyes to the sheriff's face; "but you can back up on what you said about my wife. You can refer to her as Mrs. Kane, and not in any other way. You get me?"

His hand slipped down, but his belt was not there. Belt and guns still lay on the living room table.

The sheriff was very angry. His shoulder, roughly dressed, still throbbed and burned. He could get no relief until he reached the doctor's office, whither he had been riding when he stopped at Kane's. However, he was a just man, standing four-square, and he believed he had never spoken slightingly of a woman before.

Of course, he had reckoned in his own mind that Kane, when he got his money, could have married an Oklahoma girl, and could have done at least as well as he had done by going abroad for a wife; but that was only a natural tribute to the home girls. The sheriff saw now that Kane had just cause for his stand.

"I take back what I said about your wife," he told his former deputy; "but if I made any reference to you, it lies. I saw you make a move for your gun a minute ago. You hadn't it with you, but if you want to go in the house and get it, I'll wait. When a man goes yellow, there's no reason to be afraid of him!"

It was the supreme insult, but in the face of it Kane only looked at the sheriff out of shamed and agonized eyes.

"You have a bullet in your right shoulder, sheriff," he said lamely. "You couldn't shoot it out with me."

"Couldn't?" cried the sheriff. "Couldn't, when I still have my left hand? You go get your guns, and we'll see. I'll even holster with you, and draw with my left hand."

"I'm not fighting," replied Kane, dropping his eyes.

"You're yellow, then!" said the sheriff. "You can't deny it! You've gone stale and soft, living up here in all this luxury. You ride in an automobile oftener than you fork a horse. You're afraid to risk your precious carcass, for fear you might suffer a little, and have to leave your ease and comfort for a while. It certainly is hell what money will do to a man that used to be as good as you were. Well, climb your stoop and hit your rocking-chair, and rot there, for all of me! I'm not wasting my time on anybody except *men!*"

Thomas Kane stood with bowed head, each word of the sheriff's seeming like a blow in the face.

Ledbetter's shoulder was in flames now. He sat his horse, his face twisted with pain, disappointment, and anger, and looked down at Kane, viciously enjoying the scorn that he heaped on a man in whom ease and luxury had evidently developed a yellow streak.

He caught up his reins, and was about to put spurs to his horse. He wanted to get away from Kane. Already he had a prevision of the sorrow he would feel when, his wound cooled, he considered the matter more calmly. He had admired Kane, and liked him more than any man he had ever ridden with or sent upon a hazardous errand alone.

Before he could send his horse loping down the drive, the screen door was thrown open, and Bessie came out on the porch. She came like a whirlwind, and from his horse's back the sheriff could see the blaze in her brown eyes. In her right hand she held an automatic pistol, a present from Kane. She had been afraid of his big guns when he had wanted to teach her to handle them, and he had bought her this small pistol, which he considered a toy. She had learned to shoot with it, and Ledbetter did not need to be told that it was a deadly weapon. It could send out a stream of bullets, any one of which would instantly kill a man if it struck a vital part.

Bessie leveled the pistol at the man on the horse.

"Every word you've said about my husband is a lie!" she cried passionately. "He isn't yellow, as you call it. He went and got his guns, and was buckling on his belt, a few minutes after you phoned him. I stopped him. I wouldn't let him go on that man hunt. He has risked his life often enough. He has done his share of that kind of work in this county. I'm not going to be made a widow quite so soon. You will just apologize to him, Mr. Sheriff, for what you said!"

Ledbetter made a sound in his throat. A great stillness came to his stocky body. At home he had a wife and three children, yet he rode out after outlaws and was not afraid, nor was his wife afraid. It was all in the day's work, or the night's work; but he wouldn't tell this girl that. She was too soft for the life out here. She had struck a snap, and she wasn't going to let that snap be disturbed, no matter how many outlaws menaced the countryside.

His eyelids drooping, his lips thinned to a straight line, he looked at Bessie.

"Supposing I don't apologize," he said. "What then?"

"You've got to apologize," Bessie declared, "and you've got to promise that you will spread no false stories about my husband."

"I don't argue with women," Ledbetter snapped. "I've said my last word and asked my last question. I reckon your shooting time has come. Let her pop!"

He turned in the saddle and faced her, his big chest outthrust so that it offered a perfect target.

Bessie stood looking at him for a moment. Her eyes widened. This was her first experience with a man like Ledbetter, and it gave her a better understanding of the kind of man her husband was.

Once, in the city, she had seen a man shot to death in the street by a policeman. She had stood back from the restaurant window, and had seen people run in panic from the bullets; but here was a man who not only made no move to flee, but turned his body so that he exposed himself the more. She shivered, and her hand dropped.

The sheriff laughed sardonically. He couldn't help it.

Below him Kane's face was suddenly lifted. It was dark and twisted from a passion rising like a storm in the man's breast.

"You better ride on, sheriff," he said in a low voice.

What the sheriff had said to Kane he had said in anger. He knew that his old associate was not yellow. He was resentful because the outlaw had got a bullet into him, and was, so far as Ledbetter knew, still at large in the hills. He had particularly wanted Kane on this hunt, and Kane had disappointed him.

Shartel was no ordinary criminal. He was a big fellow, fearless in his way, ruthless, a killer by nature. No wonder the sheriff had wanted the best manhood the county afforded; but now he saw why Kane had held back. He was tied to his wife's apron strings. His wife wouldn't let him hit the trail.

That was strange, too. She seemed to be a fighter when she got angry. She had made a bluff at a gun play. Of course, the sheriff had known she wouldn't shoot him; but Kane's tone now was not the tone of a yellow man.

Ledbetter knew that if he tarried for two more minutes, Kane would go for his guns. The sheriff could guess what Tom's feelings were. Moreover, having had his little explosion, the sheriff felt better. Without a word to either of them, he put spurs to his horse and swept down the drive, his right arm hanging limp.

Kane stood staring after the sheriff until the pounding of the horse's hoofs was no longer audible. Then he turned and went slowly up the steps. He glanced at the gun in his wife's hand.

"You'd better put that away," he said, and there was a trace of a sneer in his voice. "You wouldn't shoot anybody. This isn't a shooting family. It's a family of pacifics. Oh, how we do like our peace and quiet!"

Bessie dropped the gun into the pocket of her house dress, which she had not changed after supper. Kane walked over to the porch swing and dropped himself, full length, into it.

"You'd better go to bed," he told his wife. "You don't want to miss your rest. This is the restingest family in the whole State of Oklahoma. We rest, and Shartel roams the hills to-night. Oh, Lord!"

"I—I wasn't afraid to pull a gun on the sheriff," Bessie said. "I—I was just doing it for you. He might have drawn his own gun and shot me."

Kane made a sound that cannot be fitly described. He sprawled on the bed of the swing and waved his hands.

"Ledbetter shoot a woman!" he choked. "Can you beat that? Oh, go in the house, girl! You're hopping from one deep puddle to a deeper one."

Bessie went into the house and curled up on the davenport. She did not cry. She was filled with a fierce hate. She didn't know exactly whom she hated. It was Ledbetter, perhaps. Surely not her husband!

After a while she dozed. Kane went her one better. In spite of the turmoil of his mind, he dropped into a deep sleep. What was there for a yellow cur like him to do except to go to sleep? Thus he scorned himself as he drifted away.

At about that time, up in the moonlight-flooded hills, Shartel, the outlaw, was abandoning a horse whose wind had gone. He climbed a hill and began a wide detour, hoping to throw his pursuers off the track. If he didn't throw them off the track, he would kill as many as possible of them. He knew he had already winged the sheriff.

Shartel was a killer. While a boy, he had begun to buck the law, and he was still bucking it. If his own safety, his own liberty, depended upon killing half a dozen men, he would kill them with no more sympathy for them than an ordinary man would feel toward half a dozen flies he had whacked to death.

IV

Kane was a sound sleeper, ordinarily, and he could sleep on any kind of couch, but to-night he did not sleep well. It was not that the porch swing made a poor bed. It had heavy springs and deep cushions, and made a far better resting place than Kane had often known; but after an hour of slumber he awoke, and was dully aware that his happiness had been shattered.

He groaned, turned over, and dozed. Then he dropped far into sleep again. He came out of this to consider his plight dully. He groaned a second time, and dozed once more.

What with his sleeping, his uncomfortable waking, and his dozing, he seemed to have passed a long time on the porch. He lifted his head, looking for streaks of dawn, but the sky was still the sky of night. Kane yanked out his watch, and found that the hands marked five minutes to twelve. He wound the watch from force of habit, and stuffed it back in his pocket.

He turned over on his back, and clasped his hands behind his head. He had never suffered from insomnia, and he wondered what was keeping him awake. His quarrel with Bessie, probably—their first quarrel, the little rift which might widen until it became a gulf impassable.

Perhaps he had better go in and see Bessie. He judged that she was still lying on the davenport. She had not gone upstairs while he had been awake. Probably she had fallen asleep and was taking her rest. Rest! What a damnable thing rest could be, when a man should have been in action, seeking Shartel!

In that instant the dull turning over of Thomas Kane's mind stopped. He sat up quickly, and as quickly dropped his feet soundlessly to the porch floor. Through the stillness of the night had come the drumming of a horse's hoofs.

Kane stood erect, and ran to the end of the porch. His ears sought the sound of other horses' hoofs, for he had had a quick mental picture of Shartel fleeing before the sheriff's posse, or some members of it; but no other sound materialized.

The first sound came nearer, and then it abruptly stopped. The dead silence of midnight lay all about the man on the porch. He listened for a moment longer, to make sure that the horse was not ridden on again, and then he returned to the swing.

"Shartel wouldn't head this way," he told himself. "That was probably some one going home from town. He took a rush through the night, and then pulled his horse down. Looking at the moon, most likely. Probably he went to town to see some fool girl!"

Kane lay down in the hammock again, and again he slept. He awoke slowly, and felt sure that he had been roused by something unusual. Senses trained to meet emergencies became suddenly alert. He did not stir on his couch. He knew that his slightest movement would betray him in this silence, for somehow he was sure that there was some one near him.

He was equally sure that it was not Bessie. Even though they had quarreled, Bessie's approach would not stir him with such an unpleasant sensation. He had been in so many tight places in his life that he had an instinct that this was one of those breathless moments which precede a battle.

Slowly he lifted his right hand, which had been lying on his chest. He slid the hand down to his hip, and then he remembered that his guns were in the living room. He swore silently. Should he make a dash for the door, and get his guns?

He got his answer immediately. The great bulk of a man reared itself on the top step of the porch.

The man was bareheaded, and Kane saw that his hair was close-cropped. He was dressed in overalls and a jumper. The top button of the jumper was unfastened, and Kane saw that there was no shirt beneath it. The top of a hairy chest was exposed.

Dropping his eyes, Kane saw that the man's feet were bare. That was how he had managed to creep up the steps without betraying just where he was.

The man lifted a foot and stepped up on the floor of the porch. He looked at the two screen doors—the one that led into the dining room and the one that led into the living room. Kane was sure that his eyes would turn to the swing, but they did not. He seemed to be debating which door he should use.

He finally decided on the dining room door. That carried him to the other end of the porch, and away from Kane. Kane knew that Bessie had not hooked the screen of the living room door. At any rate, she had not done so while her husband was awake.

The man had a gun in his left hand. Now he shifted it to his right, while he prepared to try the door. Kane decided from that that he was left-handed. It might be a good thing to remember.

Kane lifted himself from the swing. He still wore his shoes, and they were new. He was rather clumsy in them, for he had never in the old days worn such fine, soft footwear. He wished now that he had removed the confounded things, but it was too late to remedy that.

He got to his feet just as the other man put his hand on the dining room door and tried to pull it open. That door was locked on the inside. Kane had taken only two steps when the intruder turned about. Kane dodged up against the house, into the shadows made by the porch ceiling; but he was not quick enough, and the shadows were not deep enough. The armed stranger caught sight of him at once. With a movement incredibly swift, he switched his gun from his right hand to his left.

He raised the weapon no higher than his hip, and Kane was sure that he was going to fire from there; but he did not do so. He came toward Kane slowly, keeping him covered.

"Stick yore hands up!" he whispered.

Kane now had no thought for himself. His fear was only for the girl curled up on the davenport in the living room. His job, he saw, was to divert the man from entering the house. He threw up his hands and stepped out into the moonlight.

"You've got me, Shartel," he said. "What do you want? What can I do for you?"

"Who are you?" Shartel demanded.

"Kane is my name," Kane answered.

"A-a-rgh!" Shartel spat out. "I know you! You was in the court room when I had my trial. You was standin' up ag'in' the wall, lookin' at me with them cold eyes of yourn. Yeh, I remember you! I remember all them fellas that had anything to do with puttin' me away. Yo're a deppity!"

"I'm not," Kane said. "I resigned some time ago."

It occurred to him that he might appease Shartel, and make him easier to handle, if he told the fellow that he had refused to answer the sheriff's call. He might even add the story of the sheriff's derision and scorn; but his gorge rose at the thought. There were some things he could not do, and this was one of them. The very idea angered him, and when he spoke again his voice held an angry tone.

"What are you doing here, Shartel? What do you want?"

"Yo're talkin' sense," Shartel said. "I want three things—money, food, and a hoss. Yes, and some clothes. I reckon one of your suits would about fit me."

"You don't want much, do you?" Kane sneered.

Shartel's lids half closed, and behind them Kane could see the man's eyes gleam. His thick lips dropped apart, and he breathed noisily through them. A little brick-red color fought its way to his prison-pale cheeks.

Kane knew the signs. Lust to slay was sweeping Shartel. He would take delight in sending a bullet crashing into Kane's body. It was not that killing the former deputy would do the fugitive any good. It was not that Kane was opposing him, sneering at him. It was merely the desire of a poisoned mind to shed blood.

Kane knew this in the one instant during which his life hung in the balance. He had seen men like Shartel before — men who would murder wantonly. He braced himself for the impact of the bullet; but Shartel did not fire. Slowly he relaxed. The little color died out of his cheeks, leaving his face like chalk in the moonlight. His lips drew together, and he filled his lungs through distended nostrils. His eyes opened wide.

"You was close to it, fella!" he said in his low voice. "Don't you git that notion into my head again. It was all I could do to pull myself back that one time. One more time will be one too many. Only reason I didn't shoot you was because I ain't got much time, an' I can use you. I don't want to go searchin' the house for the things I need. Who else is in the house, anyhow?"

"Only my wife," Kane answered.

"Well, where is she?"

"She went to bed a long time ago," Kane said. "I fell asleep in the swing."

"How much money you got in the house?"

Kane's red-blooded anger swept up through him again. He was being held up by the man whom he should have followed into the hills and captured. On his wife's account he would have to give Shartel whatever the man demanded. He couldn't strike a blow in his own defense. Shartel had him covered, and would shoot him if necessary. That would leave Bessie at the mercy of the outlaw. Kane saw that there was nothing for him to do but yield.

"There's something over three hundred dollars," Kane said.

"Ah!" exulted Shartel. "That would be a nice little wad. I got an idee yo're tellin' the truth. Scared you, hain't I? Well, you lead the way into the house, an' I'll foller you. I'll have my gun in the small of yore back. Rustle food, clothes, and money in a hurry, and then a hoss. What kind o' horseflesh you got?"

"About as good as any that travels hereabouts."

"That's fine! When I seen this here place, I said to myself I'd be liable to make a haul. Things is breakin' even better than I looked for. I didn't have to bust into the house an' take a chance on gettin' a bullet into me. You was layin' out, waitin' for me. My, my, but yo're an obligin' kind of a pup! Go on in the house and rustle the stuff for me!"

Kane started for the dining room door, making as if to pass around the outlaw. Shartel intercepted him with an angry mutter.

"That door is locked, an' you know it," he said. "Don't you try no tricks with me! I tell you I'll stick a bullet plumb through you if you don't do exactly what I tell you. How about this here door?"

"My wife is in that room," Kane had to tell him, for he knew that Bessie, lying on the davenport, would not escape Shartel's keen eyes. "I don't want her disturbed. You wait here, and I'll get the stuff and bring it to you."

"If you don't open that door an' step inside lively, I'll kill you, an' then I'll go in an' kill yore woman," Shartel declared. "You ain't got more 'n three seconds to make a move!"

Kane opened the door. A wave of dizziness swept through him as he did so. Leading this outlaw into Bessie's presence nauseated him; yet, for her sake, he could do no less. He knew Shartel would kill him if he disobeyed, and then Bessie would be left without protection.

Shartel's eyes swept the room, and came to rest on the girl on the davenport. They-rested on her briefly, for Shartel was one of those criminals who hold women in supreme contempt. To him they were not only the weaker sex; they were the useless sex.

"Where's your guns?" Shartel asked.

"I keep only one gun in the house," Kane said. "It's upstairs, in the dresser."

In spite of himself, his eyes wandered to the table upon which he had laid his belt. He saw that Bessie had removed her apron and had tossed it over the guns and the belt. That, he supposed, had been accidental, but he thanked God for it. He might yet get his hands on one of those guns. If he did, he would shoot it out with Shartel. He would surely shoot it out!

He took a deep breath, as he realized that for the first time since the sheriff had phoned him he might be able to face the issue cleanly and calmly.

"Well, where's the coin?" Shartel snapped.

"In a safe upstairs," Kane answered.

Shartel opened his lips to speak. Then his eyes sought the form on the davenport.

"That woman of yourn is a damned sound sleeper," he said. "I'll have a look at her."

He walked over to the davenport. Kane edged toward the table. Shartel wheeled about.

"I thought you must have a gun handy some place," he sneered. "Goin' for it, wasn't you?"

He walked over to the table and picked up Bessie's apron. He chuckled when he saw the belt and the guns.

"I held up a guy in the hills to get this gun an' these clothes," he said. "The clothes ain't much, an' the gun is a poor shootin' iron. I'm right pleased to get these two good guns!"

He buckled the belt about his waist. Without a glance at Bessie, whose sleeping he had used for an excuse to trap her husband, he ordered Kane to mount the stairs. Kane could only obey.

In the room above the living room, Kane snapped on a light.

"Turn that off!" Shartel commanded. "Some of them guys may be near here, though I think I give them the slip. D'you want to attract their attention, an' have them come pilin' in on us here? Why, I'll kill you at the first sign!"

Kane switched off the light, and knelt before a small safe in one corner of the room. He began to twirl the knob, while Shartel stood behind him with a gun against his neck. Kane considered trying to dodge under the gun and come up along Shartel's body, grappling with him, but he knew he would not be successful in that. Shartel was too quick; so he continued to twirl the knob.

"It's takin' you a long time," Shartel grumbled. "Git the thing open. I ain't got no time to waste, I tell you!"

"Open it yourself, then," Kane said, knowing he could safely show a certain amount of defiance, now that Shartel was so near the money he so badly needed. "I'm not a safe expert. I have to take this thing slow and easy."

He could have opened the safe more quickly than he did, but at last he knew he could waste no more time. Shartel's temper was too uncertain. He swung the door back.

"Bring out all the money you got," Shartel said hoarsely. "I'll take a look after you do, to make sure you've swept her clean."

Kane drew out a bundle of bank notes. Shartel stooped a little and plucked them from his hand.

There was a slight noise behind the two men. Shartel was not taken off his guard. He did not wheel about, so that his back would be to Kane. He sprang to one side, like a great cat, and backed against the wall.

One of Kane's guns came into view. He looked over his shoulder. Bessie was standing just inside the door, her automatic pistol pointed at Shartel.

Kane saw that his wife's face was as pale as Shartel's own. Her eyes were wide with a kind of frozen horror; but the hand that held the gun did not tremble. She was using all her strength, all her courage, to keep it steady.

"Put up your hands!" she said. "I'll shoot you if you don't!"

The outlaw laughed mockingly. Bessie thrust forward her head, to stare the harder. She could not understand how the man could have the courage to laugh.

"Lady," said Shartel, "you ain't goin' to shoot me. You better not. I been in more shootin' scrapes than I've kep' track of. You ain't used to handlin' a gun—I can see that plain. I can tell two seconds before you press that trigger that yo're goin' to do it. Folks that hain't used to guns has to make up their minds to shoot. Folks like me just naturally shoot. I can tell when you get ready to shoot. Before you ever press that trigger, yore eyes will blink once or twice, an' just once will be enough. I'll plug both you an' yore husband before you git a bullet into me. When I shoot, I kill. There won't be no blinking over this way. Why, you little fool, I could plug you both, even if you did stick a bit of lead from that toy into me. I could keep my feet for five minutes after I was hit. If you don't think I'm tellin' you the truth, ask yore husband. *He* knows!"

"Put down your gun, Bessie," Kane said. "You can't get him. He'll kill us both. He may do it at any minute, as it is. If he gets a sudden notion, he will begin shooting. He's a killer."

"Take the gun away from her an' drop it on the floor," Shartel ordered.

Kane advanced to Bessie and took the gun from her hand. He had an impulse to wheel and shoot it out with Shartel, but he did not obey the impulse. Shartel would probably shoot him down as he made his turning movement, and then Bessie would be alone with the outlaw.

He let the pistol clatter on the floor, and stepped back to the safe. He had dropped the money when Bessie entered the room, and now he stooped to pick it up. As he did so, there was an explosion from one of Shartel's guns, terrifyingly loud in the limited space of the room.

Kane went to his knees, and turned to look at his wife. She staggered to the dresser and caught hold of it, to give her horror-filled brain time to clear.

"I didn't hit her," Shartel said maliciously. "I was just showin' her how close I could come to her head an' not bury a bullet in her brain. She started the shootin' talk. I didn't. I wasn't botherin' her."

Kane, still on his knees, turned his eyes on Shartel. He began to rail at him in a low voice.

"I'll kill you for this later on, Shartel, if it takes a lifetime!" he said.

Shartel menaced him with the two big guns.

"Gimme that money," he ordered. "Then have yore woman rustle me some grub. You rustle some clothes, an' come with me. I'm done foolin'!"

Bessie turned about from the dresser, and managed a faint smile, for the benefit of her husband.

"Obey him, Thomas," she said. "You can't do anything else. I could have shot him in the back, but I remembered that you said men were never shot in the back in this country; and so I missed my chance. We've just got to do as he says and get him out of the house."

"Lady, you got sense!" said Shartel, with an evil grin.

V

KANE rose and handed the roll of bills to the escaped convict, who stuffed it into his overalls pocket.

"Now the clothes," said Shartel. "You seem to be well fixed, an' you must have some good suits. Just hand me out one of the best, an' the trimmin's that go with it, includin' shoes."

Kane laid out one of his new suits and the "trimmings" that Shartel required.

"Where's the keys to the house?" the outlaw asked.

"Downstairs," Bessie answered. "I'll get them."

"Yeh, you'll get them!" Shartel laughed. "We'll all go get them. We're a nice little party of three, an' I ain't goin' to let it be busted up, even for a second. Yo're a woman of spirit, lady, an' I ain't trustin' you to amble downstairs by yoreself to get them keys. Come along, mister! Herd yore wife ahead of you, an' you'll find me behind you, with these here guns ready."

They returned to the living room, and Bessie produced the keys from the table. Shartel took them.

"Upstairs again," he ordered.

Kane and Bessie could do nothing but obey, though Kane was watching for an opportunity to engage Shartel if he could do so without danger to his wife.

The convict looked into a room opposite the one they had entered before. Driving them into the room, he examined the windows and the screens, and then opened one of the screens and looked to the ground.

"I reckon you'll be safe in here for a while," he said. "I don't think either of you will take a chance on jumping to the ground. You might, mister, but yore wife would be sure to hurt herself. If you jump an' leave the lady here—"

He shrugged his thick shoulders, and the gesture was sufficiently suggestive of what he would do in that contingency.

"I'm not deserting my wife," Kane said coldly.

"That's what I'm figgerin'," Shartel grinned. "You see, a man in my fix has to do a little figgerin' now an' then!"

He slipped through the door and slammed it, and they heard the key turn in the lock.

"Can't we escape?" Bessie whispered.

"We might if we had a little more time," Kane answered; "but as it is, we'll have to wait for him. I would have to make a rope out of the bedclothing, lower you, and then go down on it myself. Shartel will be back before that."

"If we could only get to one of the cars!" Bessie lamented.

"No time," Kane said. "Our only hope is to get into action promptly after he leaves."

"We can telephone the sheriff and people along the different roads," Bessie suggested hopefully.

"Hush!" said Kane. "He's coming back!"

The key was again turned in the lock, and Shartel came in, fullly dressed, except for collar, coat, and tie. He wore one of Kane's new hats pulled down over his eyes.

"Stand over against the wall," he ordered. "There! Now I can spruce myself up an' keep an eye on you in the glass."

He put his guns, including Bessie's automatic, on the dresser, and adjusted the collar and tie. Then he slipped into the coat. Turning away from the glass, he eyed Mrs. Kane malevolently.

"The coat fits a little snug," he said, "but it 'll get me by. I ain't such a bad-looking fella when I'm dressed up, am I, ma'am?"

"Oh, you're handsome," Bessie sneered.

Shartel chuckled. Things were coming his way as he had not dared to hope they would come since he escaped from the prison in the darkness of a storm. He could afford to be amused by the girl's anger.

"Well, maybe I ain't so much to look at, lady," he taunted; "but you'll have to give me credit for bein' some hoss when it comes to action!"

"First chance I get, I'm going to kill you," Bessie declared.

Shartel stared at her. He was about to laugh again, but something in her eyes checked his mirth.

"By gosh!" he said. "I believe you would, at that, if you got the chance. I dunno how come you ever hooked up with this weak-kneed guy you got here. I'd think a lady like you would be pickin' a he-man!"

"My husband and you will meet again," said Bessie wrathfully.

Kane smiled grimly to himself. His dear wife seemed to have suffered a change of mood.

"Downstairs we go," said Shartel.

He forced them out to the hall, and locked the doors of both rooms.

"Now you rustle whatever food is ready," he ordered, when they had returned below. "Wrap it up for me. I'll eat it on my way."

Bessie hastened to wrap up some cold meat, bread, and cake. The hope that they were to be rid of this brutal ruffian lent speed to her movements. In a few minutes she laid a package on the kitchen table.

"Take it and go," she said.

"You betcha!" Shartel agreed. "I'm glad the fellas in that posse got a look at me when I downed their mighty sheriff. They'll be lookin' for a guy in overhauls an' jumpers. They won't be lookin' for no dressed-up guy like me. Now, lady, to the living room with you, an' I'll be on my way. Where's yore hat, mister?"

"I don't need any hat," Kane answered.

"Suit yoreself," Shartel returned. "You can ride bareheaded, if you like."

"Ride?" said Kane.

"Sure thing! You think I'm goin' to leave you here? Not much! Yo're ridin' with me, to give me what pertection you kin. I'd take the woman, too, but women is always in the way. Come on to that front room now!"

In the living room Shartel locked all the doors and examined the windows.

"I see you can get out of one of them windows without much trouble, lady," he said. "Well, we'll be on our way before you git started. An' I want to tell you that the minute it looks like I'm goin' to be shot down or stuck up, I'm goin' to stick a bullet into yore husband. You better stay quiet, an' let me make my get-away all peaceable an' nice!"

He looked about the room, after he had locked the doors and fastened the windows. His eyes lighted on the telephone. He took it up and yanked the cord until it broke.

"There!" he said. "You'll have to travel some little distance before you can git word to anybody. I picked this here house for my raid 'cause it stood so far away from any other house. Git goin', mister!"

Kane stepped out of the room, with Shartel at his back. The convict locked the door through which they passed, imprisoning Bessie within the room.

" Now for yore stable!" he said.

Kane led him out to the stable. Just beyond it, on the rear drive, was a two-car garage. Shartel's eyes suddenly gleamed.

" You got automobiles, have you?" he queried.

" I suppose I have," Kane answered.

" Which of these keys unlocks that shed?"

" The small flat one."

Shartel handed the keys to Kane.

" Open her up an' lemme have a look," he ordered.

Kane walked over to the garage, and unlocked and opened the door. Shartel uttered a joyful exclamation.

" Gosh!" he said. " This is my lucky night! This beats the second hoss I stole an' come here on. Which of them two cars is the fastest?"

" There's not much difference in their speed," Kane answered.

" Run the big one out here."

All along fury had been burning in Kane—fury and a wild disgust. That this big brute should be commanding Bessie and himself to obey his wishes, and enforcing his commands with guns, was sickening. Kane had all he could do to control himself, and the effort and his anger burned his big body dry.

" I can't run the car," he said. " I ride a horse when I want to go any place."

" Somebody's been runnin' the car recent," Shartel said. He shoved one of his guns viciously into the small of Kane's back. " Either you or the woman can run it. If you can't, I'll knock you cold with the butt of this gun, an' then I'll go into the house and get her, an' make her run the car. Git that car out here or take yore smash on the back of yore head. Quick!"

Kane went into the garage, climbed into the car, and backed it into the drive. Shartel got into the back seat.

" You sure you got plenty gas?" he asked.

" The tank is full."

" Git, then! Don't mind about the speed laws. Gas is for speed. On this occasion it beats a hoss. Drive fast in any direction that 'll git me out of the county an' allow you to pick the best roads. If we meet any one, I'll be crouchin' here in the dark. If yo're stopped, you tell 'em you haven't seen me. Tell 'em yore wife is sick, an' yo're on yore way for a doctor. Yuh understand me?"

" I understand," said Kane.

" If yo're held up, an' you don't git me by safe, I'll just rise up an' plug you. Then I'll shoot it out with whoever does the holdin' up. I'm well pervided for now, an' well on my way. They'll never take me back to that cussed pen! I'm goin' to be free, or I'm goin' to be dead. You've handled men before. You know whether I mean that or not. Drive on now, and make the wind blow!"

Kane knew that the man was in earnest. He drove to the road, turned into it, and opened up. The car sped away in the moonlight.

VI

Kane knew the roads and trails in his county better even than the sheriff knew them. He had been over them all on various errands. He had hunted in the hills for both game and men. Trails that few other men ever traversed were like highways to him. He could find his way on them in the dark, and had often done so.

As he drove, he turned over in his mind half a dozen plans for outwitting Shartel. They were man to man now. Bessie's fear had put Kane in a position whose consideration still sent flushes of shame through his body. He had let Shartel remain master of the situation so far only to protect his wife. Now he felt that he had played that game long enough.

Bessie was free from harm, though her husband knew, of course, that if the outlaw killed him, she would suffer more than if injury had come to herself. She had been timid at the beginning, but Kane knew that only fear for himself had ruled her. He did not doubt that she would readily have given her own life to save his.

Now he forced thoughts of his wife aside. He would have died rather than make her suffer, but he had a duty to perform, and it was a duty which must be performed at whatever sacrifice. For one thing, he must wipe out the stain on his reputation, and he must also—which was more important—prevent Shartel from getting out of the county, as he planned. He must deliver the escaped convict to the sheriff, or Shartel must kill him.

All the instincts of the man who had hunted many criminals were alive now; but no plan of action seemed to give any great hope of success. He was sitting with his back to Shartel. The man had two guns. Any hostile move that Kane might make would be promptly answered with lead. He must keep on thinking, thinking, and be ready to take advantage of any opportunity that offered itself.

For a while the car sped along on a paved road. It was making thirty-five miles an hour, and Shartel, unused to automobiles and unable to guess its speed, seemed to be satisfied. There was no sound from him. A glance over Kane's shoulder showed that he was crouched down so that he would not be seen if the car should meet another. This was unlikely, however, because Kane judged that the hour must be about two o'clock, and cars were few at that time of the early morning.

In half an hour the smooth surface ended, and the car leaped out on a dirt road. This was rocky, hilly country, and there were stones in the road. Kane eased down to thirty miles, and then to twenty. At once he heard his passenger stir, and a gun was pushed between his shoulder blades.

" Git goin' again!" Shartel ordered. " Don't you go to losin' no time!"

The man's voice was thick. Kane understood that he had been wolfing the food that Bessie had wrapped up for him.

" This is a bad road, you fool!" Kane retorted. " If we go faster than this, we're liable to ditch the car."

" You better not ditch the car," Shartel said. " You can do better than this an' keep her out of the ditch. Git goin', I tell you!"

Kane brought the speed to twenty-five miles. A backward glance showed Shartel sitting erect, gnawing at bread and meat with his great yellow teeth. He opened his mouth wide as he worked his jaws, and he slobbered and wiped his chin with the sleeve of Kane's coat.

Kane swore under his breath. This farce had gone on long enough. The showdown would have to come sooner or later, and it might as well come soon. The peril would be no greater now than after a while.

Kane decided that there was little likelihood of anything happening which he could turn to his own use and to Shartel's disadvantage. It looked as if he would merely have to take the long chance and abide by the result.

He glanced at the rocky hillsides below which the car was passing. He knew precisely where he was. He projected his mind forward along the road.

Half a mile from here there was a turn, not very abrupt, but sufficiently so to warrant his slowing down. Beyond the turn there was a stretch of road that was smoother than this. At the roadside there was a big bowlder which had rolled down the hill into the road. It had been pushed to one side, to get it out of the way of the scant traffic. Opposite the bowlder the country leveled out. Instead of a drop, there were big trees, which grew for a quarter of a mile, until they reached the jutting rim of the hills again.

Kane settled himself in his seat, his lips tight, his eyes glowing. The long chance he was going to take was very near. He could not even guess what its outcome would be.

Before he reached the turn in the road, he slowed down and stopped. Shartel's gun was instantly between his shoulders again.

" Whatcha doin'?" the outlaw demanded.

" I thought I heard a car coming from the other direction," Kane said. " Listen!"

The coming of another car would be an important event for Shartel, and his attention was instantly caught and held. He turned his head a little, the better to listen.

" No—I don't hear nothin'," he growled presently.

" I reckon I was mistaken," Kane said.

When he stopped the car, he had switched off the lights, and his hand had stolen to the door beside him. He opened it an inch, so that he could kick it fully open when the time came. He had given Shartel something to think about. He had revived in the outlaw's mind the fear that they might come upon a car filled with men loaded with six-shooters and shotguns.

Shartel withdrew his gun from Kane's back, and leaned over the back of the front seat. His face was even with the driver's shoulder. Kane had a notion to let go of the wheel, swing round, and smash his fist against Shartel's jaw; but he dismissed the idea. The blow would have to land exactly, and to have all the power of Kane's arm and shoulder behind it, in order to render Shartel incapable of using his guns. If he were not put out completely, he could fire as he fell back, and at that short range he would hardly miss. Kane resolved to adhere to his original plan.

He turned on the lights, but dimmed them. Starting the car, he went slowly around the curve. The car picked up a little. Its lights picked out the bowlder by the roadside. Kane sent the car ahead with a suddenness that threw Shartel back in his seat.

Before the convict could regain an upright position, Kane increased the speed still more, and swerved the car straight for the big stone. At the same instant he kicked open the door. Just before the car struck, he hurled himself through the door and landed sprawling in the dirt of the road.

Ahead of him there was a crash. The car struck the stone, backed away from it, rose on two wheels, settled back, and came to a standstill.

All this Kane saw over his shoulder as he sprang to his feet and dashed for the shelter of the big trees. He knew that Shartel had been thrown about in the back of the car. Before the convict could get the door open and get out, supposing that he was not injured, Kane would be in the shelter of the trees.

But he had not reckoned on the agility of the big man. Shartel, thrown from his seat, still had gripped his guns. He could not use them instantly, however, for he found himself tumbled backward upon the floor of the car. Just before his hat settled over his eyes, he saw Kane spring from the car. He pulled himself together swiftly. Getting to his feet, he took both his guns in one hand and twisted the handle of the door with the other. Then he kicked the door open and jumped into the road.

Kane was just disappearing among the trees. Shartel fired with both guns simultaneously, from each hip. He was a killer and an expert shot. The two bullets ripped across the back of Kane's coat as he took a forward step in the brief fraction of time he had before Shartel pressed the triggers.

Then the trees took Kane. With a cry of rage, the convict pursued him, firing among the trees as he went.

Kane, however, knew the locality, and Shartel did not. For a few minutes the outlaw could hear the crackling of dry branches beneath the fleeing man's feet, and he fired in the direction of the sounds till his guns were empty. Then he had to stop to reload. When he was ready to take up pursuit again, there was no sound among the trees.

VII

When Shartel stopped to reload his guns, Kane was less than a hundred yards from him. He was standing behind a big oak tree, waiting to determine whether Shartel would pursue him. He knew that the outlaw had followed the sound of his flight till he stopped, for Shartel's bullets flew in that general direction. However, they were little menace to Kane. Some of them buried themselves in intervening trees, and others sped harmlessly by.

When Kane stopped, the firing ceased, and the noise of Shartel's pursuit ceased also. Kane had counted the shots, and he easily guessed that the convict had halted to reload.

Kane did not know, of course, how much of a woodsman Shartel was. Doubtless he had been a fugitive many times, and he must know something of the craft, and of the intricacies of the chase. Kane did not believe, however, that the outlaw could creep up on him without his becoming aware of it. The course that Shartel pursued must govern the course that Kane must pursue.

Shartel could do one of two things—he could continue his flight on foot, or he could return to Kane's home. From this resulted the dilemma in which Kane found himself. If Shartel traveled away from the house, Kane could follow him till he found a telephone or a place where he could obtain guns and help. If the outlaw returned to the bungalow, Kane knew that he must be close on the man's heels, for Shartel would now be in no mood to take chances. He would either steal a horse, make Bessie drive him away in the other car, or—perhaps something worse.

Decision was difficult. If Kane returned to his home, he could anticipate Shartel's arrival. He could get into the bungalow by a window and take from the dresser drawer the old gun about which he had spoken to Shartel. The convict had overlooked that gun after they went upstairs. He seemed to have forgotten it.

On the other hand, if Shartel did not go back to Kane's and Kane went there by a way he knew, he would have lost the trail of the fugitive. His own telephone was out of commission, and the nearest house was a mile away from where he stood among the trees.

He decided, at last, that the only thing he could do was to wait for Shartel to make a move. This was dangerous, for the outlaw might have a blunderer's luck. Doubly armed, he might stumble on Kane, while the latter had no weapon of any kind.

Kane had no doubt that Shartel would kill him if he found him now, for the outlaw would be possessed by a red rage, and he would want to destroy the man who knew where he was. Also, since the car was disabled, Kane would be of no further assistance to the fugitive.

Kane stood and waited. Ten minutes passed. During those ten minutes no sound was audible. The brooding night silence was unbroken, and the trees were so thick and heavily leaved that little of the moonlight filtered through them.

Kane stood in a darkness which concealed him. It concealed Shartel, too. He would give no warning of his approach, except as he might break a limb or a twig under his feet. There was a carpet of these twigs and limbs all through the woods. The trees were oak, and they shed their brittle branches whenever there was a high wind.

At the end of the ten minutes Kane caught the sound for which he was listening. A dry branch, probably as thick as a man's finger, snapped with a report which seemed loud in that deep silence.

The sound came from beyond Kane. He knew then that Shartel had passed him at a distance of perhaps fifty feet, and had gone on a hundred feet or so farther. This showed that the outlaw knew how to travel in the darkness of the timber. He had progressed silently till he betrayed himself by stepping on a brittle branch. Probably he had become a little careless after moving so far without making a sound. Kane became aware that the brute against whom he was matching his wits was a woodsman, and therefore all the more dangerous in this particular situation.

Kane let more slow minutes slip by. The unbroken silence held. He decided to move in Shartel's direction, stepping from tree to tree. The outlaw had proved that he could move without sound, and even now he might be creeping away.

Kane safely gained the spot from which he judged the sound of the breaking branch had come. He peered from behind a tree, but there was no sign of Shartel.

He moved up closer to a huge oak which was directly before him. The convict might easily be behind that. He bent low as he came to the tree, and then cautiously thrust his head around the trunk. The tree concealed no one. Kane stood up and wiped his forehead.

"I can't stay here," he told himself. "I've got to get back to Bessie. Protecting her from that big brute is the main job right now!"

He turned and made for the road. The moon had passed the zenith by now, and when Kane reached the road its light was flooding along the clay ribbon, making it lighter than the early dawn would have made it.

For a space he stood by the roadside and waited. Behind him there was suddenly the first twitter of awakening birds, heralding the dawn. Far off, roosters aroused themselves to greet the coming day. Haste was needed now, Kane decided, for whatever Shartel did would be done quickly. He had only a little time to work under cover of darkness.

Kane went along the road till he came to his wrecked car. After a moment of listening, he stepped out to it. A swift examination showed that the front of the car was badly smashed, but Kane had a notion that it might at least limp back home. He decided to make the attempt to get to Bessie. Her safety was his first consideration, even though his capture of Shartel would have redeemed him in the sheriff's eyes, and in the eyes of the men who were still beating the hills for the escaped convict.

He got into the car, and, after working for a while, managed to back it away from the bowlder. There was something wrong with the engine, for it knocked and pounded in a way that was disgraceful in a machine so new and so expensive. Kane succeeded, however, in turning the car about in the road and heading it for home. He started it limping in that direction.

He had not gone a hundred feet when a bullet tore through the car above his head. He stopped at once, because there was nothing else for him to do. He knew that Shartel was firing on him from the roadside. The outlaw had eleven bullets remaining, and one of them would not fail to hit the man at the wheel. Inwardly Kane cursed himself for the mistake he had made.

"It's hands up for mine, Shartel," he called disgustedly.

The convict stepped into the road from among the trees, and ran to the side of the car. He jammed a gun into Kane's ribs.

In all his experience with criminals the former deputy had never seen a face so torn with passion as Shartel's was now. The bloodless cheeks quivered as the mouth worked soundlessly. Such anger was sweeping the outlaw that for the moment he was incapable of utterance. His slitted eyes burned as if they had been coals lifted from a hot fire. The hand that held the gun was tense.

Apparently Shartel did not at the moment intend to shoot Kane, but the latter knew that he might do so accidentally, so far had his self-control been swept away from him. That thick forefinger might press the trigger without Shartel's willing it to do so.

"I've got both my hands up, you yellow cur!" Kane ground out. "What are you going to do?"

"Yellow cur, eh?" Shartel ground out in his turn. "A-a-rgh, but you'll never be closer to bein' blowed up than you are now! Only one thing saves you—if I kill you, an' they get me, they'll lynch me. They don't kill men legal in this State no more. If the chair was waitin' me, I'd kill you where you sit! Besides, I got to use you. I hate to use a white-livered pup like you, but I got to. Put down yore hands an' open that door!"

Kane obeyed. Shartel stepped into the seat beside him and pressed a gun into his ribs.

"Now you git back to yore house as quick as the devil will let you," he commanded. "We'll git that other car of yourn, an' make another try. On this next trip I'll be waitin' to shoot you the minute you don't do what I tell you. I'll be sittin' by yore side right like this. You understand me? You understand that I'll shoot you the minute you make a false move?"

"I understand," Kane said grimly.

He understood what the outlaw was saying. He understood more. He would have to give his life to make sure that Shartel was captured. That seemed inevitable now.

By the time they got the other car and started out again, morning would have come. The people of the countryside would be on the stir. Kane must somehow give the alarm to some of these, and must take Shartel's bullet. After that, the outlaw's chances of escape would be slight. He would be in a stalled car, which he could not drive. New posses would run him down before he could get away.

At least, Kane would wipe out the stain on his reputation. The sheriff would know that he was not yellow. Bessie would have to take what sad comfort she could in knowing that he had died game, like a man.

He sighed, nevertheless, when he thought of Bessie. Man hunts and gun plays were all new to her. He had taken her out of security, and fate had plunged them into an adventure as wild as any Kane had ever known. He had done everything he could to make her life safe and serene, but the cards seemed to have been stacked against her.

Shartel broke in on his thoughts.

"Can't you get no more speed than this out of the old boat?" he asked.

"I can't, and I doubt if she'll do as well as this before long," Kane retorted. "She's about as well able to travel as you'll be when you get a bullet in your lungs."

"When you get yore bullet, it won't be in yore lungs," Shartel retorted. "It 'll be in yore heart!"

"I suppose so," Kane returned. "You're the kind that would shoot an unarmed man through the heart."

"Wouldn't I, though?" said the outlaw, licking his lips.

The car came to a slight decline in the road. Beyond this there was a little rise. The car slipped down the hill, and started up the rise. It panted hard, and seemed about to stop, but it finally made the crest.

Kane looked ahead. On the level road before him he saw a man riding one of the horses of a harnessed team. He knew the man for a neighbor who lived about a mile away. He was taking his team to the far end of his five-hundred-acre farm. Kane had seen him working down there only a few days before.

In spite of himself, Kane felt a quiver go through his body. Shartel, watching him, with the gun prodded into his ribs, observed the quiver.

"Hopin', are you?" he whispered. "Well, don't you give this guy nary sign! If he speaks, you speak, an' that's all. Get by him with a nod, if you can."

"If I thought he had a gun, I'd take a

chance," Kane said. "By the time you got me he'd get you."

"I got two guns," Shartel said. "Here he is. Lemme see you make a break to him!"

The man on the big lumbering horse stared curiously at the battered car.

"Had a smash-up, neighbor?" he asked. "Anything I kin do?"

"Hit that bowlder back there," Kane answered. "I can limp home, I reckon."

"I could haul you with the team," the man suggested. "It ain't so fur."

"I can make it," Kane said, and he kept on going.

The team pounded on. Kane turned to Shartel. His face was gray.

"I'll tell you this," he said in open anger. "The first chance I get, I'm going to turn you in. That man's my neighbor. When the whole of this story is told, he'll have his piece to speak about how I had you in my car and rode by him, protecting you. You can kill me, Shartel, but I'm betting you now that the doors of the pen are already wide for you!"

"Mebbe," Shartel said; "but I'll kill you first!"

They spoke no more. Growing weaker and weaker, the car appeared to be ready at any moment to stop altogether; but at length they got into the drive leading to Kane's bungalow and garage.

"Git down," Shartel ordered, when Kane had driven the car beyond the garage.

Kane obeyed.

"Open the door an' git that other car out here," Shartel said.

Kane threw open the door. He stood staring. Behind him Shartel emitted a gasp of surprise.

"Gone!" he breathed against Kane's neck. "The cussed thing's gone!"

"What are you going to ride now?" Kane jeered.

These were close quarters for Shartel. Since day was about to dawn, he needed a car more than he had needed it before. In the dark, he might safely have fled on horseback, but he could scarcely do so with sunlight flooding the country. He seemed to be faced with another day of hiding out.

He stood looking at Kane, his brain working with the rapidity of the brain of a criminal at bay. Then a criminal's cunning gave him an inspiration.

"The day is near," he said. Kane could not understand his exultation, seemingly born of that fact. "It won't be safe for me in this here country in daylight, so you'll just take me into yore house an' keep me there. Nobody'll ever dream of lookin' for me under yore roof. I can hide there, well fed and pertected, till night comes, an' then we'll try again to git out of the county. Come on!"

There was a limit to the former deputy's endurance, even for his wife's sake. He stepped back a little, his body tense.

"I'll not take you where my wife is again," he said.

"Won't you?" Shartel jeered. "Won't you, though! Well, all right! I'll just bash yore head in. Then I'll carry you up to the house, an' she can have the pleasure of nursin' you through the day, while she waits on me. I'll lay you out, you skunk, an' then, while yo're laid up, me an' her will come to terms!"

The last vestige of self-control was gone from Kane. He stooped and tried to spring under Shartel's gun. The outlaw, from long experience in tight places, was prepared for just such a move. The gun in his right hand came smartly down on the back of Kane's head. Instead of grappling Shartel about the knees, Kane plunged against him and dropped prone.

The convict stood looking down at Kane, with a grin on his face. Then he stooped and gathered up the inert body, holstering his guns before he did so.

Kane lay quietly, with closed eyes. He was not completely unconscious. There had been an instant of roaring in his head, an instant of downfalling blackness; but the black cloud held off, and left him in a gray mist. He could barely have seen if he had opened his eyes, but he was conscious of motion as Shartel bore him to the house.

Exerting all his will, he fought to lift his brain to steadiness. By the time they reached the back door, he had at least partly succeeded.

Shartel released a hand and knocked on the door casing. The echo resounded within, but there was no answering step. Bessie failed to come running to the door, as the convict had expected she would do.

An oath escaped his lips. He looked down at Kane, still quiet in his arms.

"Cuss her!" Shartel said. "Is she tryin' to trick me? Has she got somethin' up her sleeve?"

He thought now, too late, of the gun in

the dresser drawer. He lamented that he had forgotten that. It created a ticklish situation. In the house there might be an armed and angry woman to deal with.

Raising his hand, he slapped Kane sharply in the face. The former deputy was almost normal by now. With an oath, he rolled out of Shartel's arms and dropped to his feet. Dizzily he made as if to rush in on the outlaw. Shartel's two guns were instantly leveled at him.

"If it's the show-down, let it be," he grated. "Here's the daylight, an' I'm hemmed in. Daylight always brings more of them accursed man hunters. Stop where you are, mister, or I'll drill you!"

Kane stopped. He knew Shartel would do what he said. The outlaw had his back to the wall.

The fact gave Kane a little glow of satisfaction. At least, Shartel had not got away from him in the night. Sending his car against the bowlder had made for that much delay, at any rate.

"Git around to one of them windows in the living room," Shartel ordered. "Call to yore wife, an' tell her yo're a dead man if she tries any tricks. Git goin'!"

Kane led the way around the corner of the house. They came up to the window. The householder looked at the screen, and a triumphant laugh broke from him. Shartel swore.

"My wife's gone, Shartel," Kane said, turning and leaning back against the house. "She's got out of this window and went off in the other car. You can see that, can't you? She's outwitted you. Posses! By the Lord, you'll have posses on your trail now!"

"Stand aside," said Shartel thickly.

Kane stood aside. The outlaw seized the screen and tore it from its upper fastenings. Then he raised the window.

"That proves she's gone," Kane said. "The window was fastened on the inside when we left."

"Stand back a piece," Shartel directed.

Kane stepped back. Shartel menaced him with the gun for a moment, and then he turned swiftly and leaped through the window.

"Come on in here," he said, pointing the gun at Kane.

The former deputy followed him through the window.

Kane's heart was light now. Bessie was gone. She was out of harm's way. The friendly day had dawned. Escape for Shartel would be almost impossible. If Kane lost his own life, the sheriff and the other men would surely know that he had had the courage to front Shartel at the last, unarmed though he was. When they found his body, wherever it might be, they would discover that he had died without a gun in his hand. The smashed automobile would be mute evidence that he had delayed Shartel's flight until the outlaw could be caught.

"Take them keys and hustle through the house," Shartel said. "I want to make sure that woman ain't here."

They ran through the lower floors, Shartel always just behind Kane with his prodding guns, and then they went up the stairs. Bessie was not in the house.

Downstairs, Shartel paused in the living room. The frown of heavy, slow thought was between his eyes.

"We got to git out of here," he said. "That woman of yores has had time to git almost any place. Them fellas may be slow in coming here, but I can't risk it. In time a hundred men will be surroundin' this house. We got to git goin'. How many hosses you got, fella?"

"Three," said Kane promptly. "Good ones, too."

He was glad that Shartel had decided to take to the open. He did not know what course Bessie would pursue. She might get in touch with the sheriff, and the sheriff might send men over the country. It was barely possible that Bessie would return to the house alone. The sooner he and Shartel left, the safer Bessie would be.

"Come on to the barn," Shartel said. "You throw saddles on two of them hosses, an' we'll get out of here. Looka here, fella, it's the show-down. You lead me out of here, or you git yore dose of lead. Take yore choice!"

"I've chosen," said Kane grimly.

VIII

"Yo'RE mighty willin' all of a sudden," Shartel said suspiciously. "I got a notion yo're plannin' to double-cross me somehow. You better not!"

Kane looked into the frowning face of the big outlaw. His own countenance was twisted, lip and brow, with a frown as ugly as Shartel's.

"Why, certainly I'm planning to double-cross you," Kane said. "What do you think? Think I won't turn you in if I get a chance? What do you take me for, you yellow cur?"

"Yo're talkin' big," Shartel said uneasily. "What's happened that's give you yore nerve all of a sudden?"

"You'll find out soon enough," Kane retorted.

Shartel suddenly thrust one of his guns into the pit of Kane's stomach.

"I've a notion to drill you right now!" he grated.

Kane experienced a quiver up and down his spine. He did not think Shartel would kill him just yet, but he knew that what an angered, uncontrolled man would do was problematical, at the best. However, he had to run his bluff through.

"Oh, you're not going to drill me," he said quietly. "You can't afford to. You need me. You don't know this country, and I do. You're just as likely to take the wrong way as the right one. Besides, as you said, the boys will give you the rope, if you kill me."

Shartel snarled into Kane's face. He stood for a moment, thinking deeply. Then he caught an idea out of what Kane had said.

"We'll waste a couple more minutes while you tell me where yo're goin'," he said. "That remark of yores about me not knowing the country was first-rate. You take a pencil and paper, and show me how you can get me out of here safe. Be cussed quick about it, too!"

Kane could feel his blood grow hot with hope. He had all he could do to keep the fierce glow from showing in his face. He could have laughed. Shartel had made a request that would work against him in the end, if any one came to the house seeking the outlaw.

"You've got to have a diagram, have you?" he sneered. "Well, I reckon I'll have to show you."

He sat down at the table and took up pencil and paper. With the pencil he made a circle in the upper right-hand corner of the sheet.

"Here's where we are," he said. "The river is right here. We can ride up that road we took, and—"

"We won't ride up that road," Shartel said. "That cussed farmer may have said somethin' about meetin' you an' another man, an' that road may be full of men lookin' for us. They'll be comin' this way before long, if that farmer met anybody. Them lonely guys can't talk fast enough if they meet up with anybody. We'll take another way."

"Well, the river is right here," said Kane patiently. "It hasn't flowed away in the last twenty seconds. We can turn in the other direction. That takes us to a road here. Then we turn off into the hills on a trail I know. We ride like this, and come to the river. You can steal a boat and get over into Arkansas. Then the game will be in your own hands."

"Yeh, a boat!" Shartel jeered. "I see myself rowing a boat through three counties! I've seen men try to escape in boats before, an' somebody picks 'em off from the shore. I'll ride the hoss till he drops, an' then I'll steal another. You'll keep along with me till I tell you to turn back—if I let you turn back at all. Come on!"

"Very well," said Kane.

He crumpled up the piece of paper and tossed it on the table. He rose quickly and started for the door. Shartel followed him, paying no attention to the paper.

Kane grinned as he walked ahead of the outlaw. While Shartel was speaking, he had drawn lines from circle to circle on the sheet. Along one line he had written "Pope Road," and on along another "trail to river." If any one came to the house and found the paper, it would show in what direction Kane had led the escaped convict. Shartel was keen in a rough way, but he had not been keen enough to understand that the paper might betray him. He was too much worried about the plight in which he now found himself to consider what looked like an utterly insignificant matter.

In five minutes the two men were riding briskly up the road that Kane had indicated on his rude map. The sun was above the horizon now, and already it gave promise of an exceedingly hot day. The light shone into the men's faces. They drew their hats over their eyes, and rode on.

They met only one car before they came to the trail. Kane did not know the occupant of the vehicle, and the stranger did not look at the two men. As a precautionary measure, however, Shartel rode alongside Kane, so that the former deputy's horse was between his and the car.

When they came to the head of the trail, Kane pulled up his horse.

"What you stoppin' here for?" Shartel demanded.

"This is the trail," Kane answered. "I'm giving you a chance to look at it and see how you like it. It's hard riding. I reckon you're some soft for the saddle, ain't you?"

"Never mind about me bein' soft," Shartel retorted. "I'll follow you. This don't look like much of a trail to me. You leadin' me into somethin', fella?"

"If I can," Kane replied cheerfully. "The trail is here, all right. You couldn't have found it by yourself. It's overgrown for a little way, and it's not much of a trail after you hit it. You'll have to be a pretty good horseman to negotiate it."

"I kin ride any trail you kin," Shartel said. "Git goin'!"

Kane put his horse through the bushes that grew at the roadside, and Shartel followed him. For a hundred yards they rode through bushes up to the horses' bellies.

Kane was riding a horse which he had raised himself, and he had taught the animal some tricks. He made it dance along, swerving from side to side, so that the bushes were trampled for a width of three feet. He was leaving a trail that pursuers could not miss. If only one of the searchers would go to the house and find that map!

"What you pullin' off?" Shartel asked. "Can't you handle that hoss? You talk about me bein' saddle soft, an' about a man havin' to know how to ride. You handle that hoss like you was doin' stunts in a circus. Come off, now! Pull him down, an' git goin'!"

Kane pulled the horse down, and the animal went along sedately.

"You must be feelin' good," Shartel grumbled, with a return of his uneasiness. "Yo're playin' a hunch of some kind, but you better remember I'm the guy with the guns!"

Kane glanced back at the outlaw. His face was pale, and there were beads of sweat on it. He looked very tired. Months in prison had made him not only saddle soft, but soft for any kind of continued exertion.

Kane had another hunch. Perhaps he would be able to wear the big man down. A sudden attack of illness from the heat and exertion was not impossible. He would keep Shartel traveling as long as possible.

The trail now wound away among the trees. It had been made of old by countless cattle on their way to the river, but the cattle were gone now, and second-growth stuff had sprung up rapidly in the fecund soil.

Kane took advantage of this. After traveling for half a mile, he stopped. He knew precisely where the trail went, but he was sure that Shartel could not discern it. To the unpracticed eye they stood amid pathless woods, and one direction was as good as another for traveling.

"Well, what is it?" Shartel asked in a husky voice.

"You're getting tired," Kane said, turning in his saddle and looking back. "Don't you want to rest a while? You'll wear yourself out."

"Never you mind about me wearin' out," Shartel cried furiously. "You git goin' again, an' keep at it! Which way does this cussed trail lead?"

Without a word Kane turned his horse to the right. The animal danced through the brushwood, trampling it. Shartel followed, an anxious, questioning look in his eyes. They went on for a short distance. Then Shartel sent his horse up alongside Kane's, and once more thrust his gun into Kane's ribs.

"Cuss you!" the outlaw rasped. "Yo're circlin' back, or tryin' to. You think you can fool me? Look at that sun above the trees. Yo're comin' around into it, an' we been ridin' away from it since we come in here. Yo're tryin' to git me back on the road. Yo're tramplin' them bushes to leave markin's for anybody follerin' us. Now, you turn back an' keep that sun behind us!" He raised his voice. "Cuss you, you better not make no more plays like that! I *am* gittin' tired. I been locked away from light an' air for some centuries, seems like, an' I ain't the man I will be when I've been out a couple of months. Yo're gittin' me to the end of my patience. I can drill you an' go on by myself. You can take yore choice. It's my last word!"

Kane knew that this was truth born of desperation. He would have to obey Shartel in every particular from now on. He had played the man as far as he could.

"All right, Shartel," he said. "I've been stringing you some, but I'll lead to the river now. It's not far."

"Go on, then!" Shartel grunted.

They went on, Kane still in the lead. At times the going was so rough that they had to walk the horses. Once in a while they could run for a short distance.

On the way, Kane was thinking hard. He was considering the exhaustion which was evidently coming upon Shartel. The man would have to rest before long. At any time he might droop in his saddle, and his head might go to his chest for an instant. Kane knew he must be ready for that instant. He would need no more to throw himself on the outlaw.

"How much farther?" Shartel asked, after a while. "I'm dried up. I got to have water. You got to remember I been on my feet for a long time, hustlin' ahead of them cussed man hunters. I'd like to kill a bunch of 'em!"

"We'll be at the river in a minute or two," Kane said. "Then you can drink your fill."

As he spoke, he looked back at Shartel. The outlaw was staring at him with eyes which weariness had inflamed till no white showed. Deep lines had come into the man's face. Its prison pallor was unrelieved by any touch of color. Even the lips were blue.

"I know what yo're thinkin'," Shartel said. "Yo're thinkin' that you'll jump me when I kneel down to drink. Well, I'll have an eye on you! You can't git me, fella—no use in yore tryin'!"

His voice was a mumble. Kane knew that he was going light-headed, like a man lost in a desert and borne down by heat, thirst, and weary, unending travel.

Under Kane's eyes, however, the outlaw shook his head and raised it.

"I'm all right," he declared, as if Kane had voiced thoughts about his condition. "Don't you worry about me! A little water will straighten me out."

As he spoke, the river appeared before them among the trees.

"Ah!" cried Shartel, the exclamation coming huskily from a dry throat.

Kane rode down to the water's edge.

"Git off yore horse," Shartel ordered, and, as Kane obeyed, he added: "Walk along the bank five paces, an' no more. Then stand there with your back to me. Don't you move!"

Kane had to obey the outlaw, for he had both guns in his hands.

When Kane had taken his position, Shartel put the guns down within easy reach, knelt, and sucked in a mouthful of water. Then he raised his head and let the water trickle down his throat, keeping his eyes on Kane's back.

"I'm watchin' you, fella!" he called. "I take one gulp quick as a snake strikes, an' then I look at you. You needn't try to play no hunch. My guns is right by my hand!"

"I'm waiting for a drink myself," Kane said. "It might occur to you that I'm thirsty, too."

"You'll git a drink when I've had my fill," Shartel retorted. "I don't aim to fill my stomach all of a sudden, an' make myself sick."

His voice, Kane noted, was already stronger. The water was reviving him. He would be able to fight back his weakness for a space.

"Now," he said presently, "I'm goin' to souse my face an' head. When I git that done, you can walk down where you are an' drink my wash water. I hope it poisons you!"

"It probably would, if I drank it," Kane remarked.

"Well, help yoreself," Shartel invited.

Kane turned about. Shartel was drying his hands on a red handkerchief. His face was not so drawn. He seemed to have reservoirs of strength which the reviving effect of a drink of water had enabled him to tap.

Kane waited till the current had flowed past him for a moment, for he had no intention of drinking Shartel's wash water. Then he knelt and drank.

As he rose, he saw that Shartel had sat down. He held his guns in his hands, and his face was toward Kane.

"We'll rest for fifteen minutes," the outlaw said. "I can't afford to git beat out. I was beginnin' to waver in the saddle a minute ago. You needn't take no hope from that, though, fella! I'll be as good as new at the end of the fifteen minutes. You can squat down there an' think yore own thoughts."

Kane sat down. Shartel relaxed. Kane saw that he had been hunted so often that he had learned the secret of bringing back his strength by a few moments of complete rest. His eyes were half lidded, but Kane knew that he was watching closely. The former deputy could make no move just yet.

However, he could bide his time. The sun would be higher presently, and the heat would increase. After a while, as they plodded along, a thermometer would register up toward ninety-five. There would be no breeze. A brazen sun would burn in a cloudless sky of intense blue. They had no food.

Two or three hours' riding would find Shartel at the end of his strength, Kane was sure. If he husbanded his own strength, as he would surely try to do, he might overcome the outlaw by one sudden onslaught. He thrilled to that thought. If he could lead Shartel back to the sheriff, he would make Ledbetter eat dirt!

After a while Shartel got stiffly to his feet. Kane made a move toward his own horse, but Shartel menaced him with the guns.

"Stay where you are till I mount," he rasped. "Yo're altogether too previous!"

Kane stood still. Shartel holstered one gun and held the other in his right hand. He climbed laboriously into the saddle. Backing his horse, he stopped it ten feet from Kane's.

"Now, you can get into yore saddle," Shartel said.

Kane mounted.

"We'll go along the river, shall we?" he asked pleasantly.

"Certainly we'll go along the river," Shartel flamed. "What in blazes do you think we come down here for? An' you keep that sun right where it is now. If you go to circlin', I'll plug you. I can git along by myself now."

"We'll be traveling southeast if we keep to the river," Kane retorted. "I can't keep the sun exactly where it is. I'm not the manager of the sun!"

A bellow of rage came from Shartel. Kane saw him strike his horse with his heels. Weariness and anxiety had exhausted the outlaw's self-control, and Kane's taunts had snapped his temper off short.

The former deputy saw Shartel's horse lunge toward him. He thought the convict meant to kill him now. He struck his own horse, and swerved it to one side.

Shartel appeared not to have expected this move. He fired just as Kane's horse swerved, and the bullet flew past its rider. Then the two animals were alongside each other.

The shot had startled Shartel's horse, and the animal, all along suspicious of its new rider, jumped to one side. Shartel's gun hand went to the saddle horn. Kane bore in on him, and, reaching out, struck him on the forearm. The gun fell to the river bank.

The horses came together. Shartel swung around with his left hand, and the blow caught Kane on the mouth. He was thrown back in his saddle.

Strengthened by anger, the outlaw threw himself from his own saddle. His horse, trembling, backed away. Shartel picked up the gun.

Kane drove his horse at the outlaw as the latter was about to come up with the gun in his hand. Shartel threw an arm over his face and dodged to one side, still in a stooping position. Kane's horse sprang past him, but came about swiftly in response to its rider's pull.

For a fraction of time the horseman and the man on foot faced each other. Kane's eyes were on Shartel's. He was waiting for the signal in those eyes which would mean that the outlaw was going to fling up his hand and fire. At the first hint of that, Kane was prepared to drop down behind his horse. He knew he had little chance; he could only do his best.

Shartel did not at once make a hostile move. Kane, however, took no hope from that, for he knew that Shartel, as many killers will do, was enjoying his deadly moment before he slew.

The outlaw's lips were drawn back from his ugly teeth. A little blood had somehow struggled into his face, and was dyeing it with uneven splotches of color. It was not the twist of the thick, cruel lips that sent a shiver through Kane. It was the expression in the small eyes.

If those eyes had been full of fire, Kane would not have been surprised. It was what he expected; but they did not blaze. They were cool, and the inflamed look had gone out of them. Shartel, slayer of men, was finding a sweet, smooth pleasure in his contemplation of this man whom he was about to kill. His eyes held such a look as a normal man's would have held if they had gazed on some beautiful sight.

"You prayin', fella?" the outlaw asked.

Kane said nothing. He still awaited that signal; and at length it came. Slowly the killer's eyes seemed to grow darker. They widened to their full extent. His lips drew together in a straight line. His face hardened, and the color went out of it. Shartel leaned forward, and his body drew together till he was crouching. His eyes began to flame.

Kane dropped swiftly from the saddle, putting his horse between him and the outlaw. There was a shot—then a second, a third. No bullets went past Kane.

He peered across his horse. Shartel was standing where he had been, but his gun hand was down. His left hand clutched at his side, and blood was trickling through his fingers.

While Kane watched him, he tried to hold himself erect. He tried to lift his head. He tried to bring up the hand that held the gun; but he could not do it. Slowly his knees buckled—slowly, then swiftly. He crashed down, as a giant tree crashes after its first slow leaning when the last severing blow is struck.

Kane ran around his horse and looked down at the fallen man.

For a few seconds Shartel lay still. Then he lifted his head. He had dropped his gun, but it had fallen near him. His fingers crept to it, and tightened around the butt. He raised himself with his left hand, but his arm could not sustain his weight. He dropped back. He tried to raise his gun hand, but failed.

He would not give up, however. His glazed eyes looked out from his face as he turned it from side to side, trying to locate Kane. Then, with a great effort, he brought his left arm around in front of him, and took hold of his right forearm with his left hand. Kane knew that he was attempting to prop up his right hand in an effort to shoot.

The former deputy sprang forward, plucked the gun from Shartel's hand, and removed the other guns from his holster and his pockets. The outlaw rolled over on his back, and Kane thought he would die then and there; but he did not. His lips moved. Kane bent down to catch the low words.

"Shoot me, fella!" muttered Shartel. "I know yo're goin' to do it, so be quick about it!"

Kane knelt beside the wounded man and began to uncover his wound. As he did so, three shots, close together, rang out in the distance. Kane fired three shots into the air from a fully loaded gun. Then he went to work on Shartel's wound.

IX

Only one of three shots fired at Shartel had taken effect, and Kane could not tell whether the wound was going to be fatal or not. The outlaw was still breathing, and he seemed to be dimly conscious. He did not speak, but his eyes clung to Kane's face and moved as Kane moved his head.

Pulling back the man's shirt, Kane discovered a hole in his right side, just below the shoulder. Shartel's heart was safe, anyhow; the question was whether the bullet had gone through the right lung. Kane could not tell about that.

Gently he rolled the outlaw on his side, and uncovered his back. There was no wound there. The bullet had not come through.

Kane restored Shartel to his former position on his back, and found that blood was issuing afresh from the wound. With a clean handkerchief he stanched the flow as well as he could. Then he went down to the river, and filled his hat with water. After he had moistened Shartel's lips, he managed to get him to take a couple of swallows, and bathed the wounded man's face and chest.

Shartel's eyes opened to the full, and his lips moved.

"Who killed me?" he asked, as Kane bent down to catch the whispered words.

"You're not dead yet," Kane said. "We'll get you to a doctor. There's help in the neighborhood. I'll see if I can get some of the boys headed this way."

He emptied his gun in the air, and was immediately answered by three more shots, nearer at hand than the first three had been. Kane stood erect, cupped his hands, and yelled at the top of his lungs. An answering shout came from among the trees to his left.

Kane kept on shouting at intervals, and presently three men emerged from the woods a short distance down the stream. Catching sight of Kane, they quickened their steps and came up to him. They looked at him curiously, and then glanced down at Shartel.

"Shot him, did you, Kane?" one of them asked.

Kane knew, from the coldness in the speaker's tone, that he had heard of the former deputy's refusal to join in the man hunt. Kane's face flushed. He drew himself up.

"Why, no—no, I didn't shoot him," he answered.

"You didn't? Who did?"

"Dog-goned if I know," Kane said. "He was just going to plug me when somebody fired from among the trees, and he went down with a bullet in his chest."

These were big men and rough. They were courageous, and they had felt a kind of vicarious shame when they learned that Kane had refused to join them. Moreover, they were incapable of receiving a fairy tale without question. The story that Kane was telling seemed incredible. Here he was with a gun in his hand, and a wounded man lay at his feet. It was as neat a two-and-two as a straight-thinking man could ask for.

One of the three men stepped beyond the other two and ranged himself at Kane's side, his eyes on Shartel's upturned face. Kane knew this man. He was a farmer from up the river—a man of good repute, fearless, honest.

" How come you're here with this fella, Kane?" he asked.

" He had a gun on me till he got that wound in his chest," Kane answered. " He came to my house in the night, and held up me and my wife. He made me take him away in one of my cars, at first, but I fooled him on that. Then he made me saddle two horses and ride down here with him. Why are you looking at me like that, Wilson?"

Wilson was regarding the former deputy with cold, speculative eyes. His lips curled slightly before he spoke.

" I dunno if you've heard it or not, Kane," he said, " but the sheriff appointed me to take your place when you throwed up your job. I'm a deputy."

His eyes challenged Kane as he uttered the last sentence, as if the statement had more meaning than it appeared to have on the face of it. Kane was puzzled.

" Why, that's all right," he said. " I'm glad you got the job, if you wanted it. Since you're an officer and I'm not any more, you can take charge here."

He stepped back, as if by that action he gave way to Wilson.

In spite of the gun in Kane's hand, Wilson drew his own gun. It was a nervy thing to do, for Wilson was not fast on the draw. He had thick hands and stubby fingers. If Kane's own gun had been holstered, he could have drawn it and shot Wilson while the man's hand was moving toward his weapon; but Kane did not attempt to lift his gun hand. The deputy covered him.

" Keep your hand down! Turn your gun around and hand it to me, butt first," he ordered.

" The gun's empty," Kane said.

" Do what I say!"

Kane had a notion to disobey. He didn't like Wilson's tone. What was the man's suspicion, anyhow? However, he instantly thought better of his fleeting impulse, and handed over the gun, butt first.

Wilson dropped it into his pocket. Then he knelt beside Shartel.

" Plugged bad, all right," he said, rising. He turned to one of the other men. " Go get the horses," he ordered. " We'll have to get this guy to a doctor. He's entitled to medical attention, no matter what he is or has done."

The man ran along the river and disappeared among the trees. Wilson still kept his eyes on Kane.

" You're under arrest, Kane," he said.

" Under arrest?" Kane repeated. " What for?"

" I dunno what the charge will be. The sheriff can decide about that. I don't like the looks of this thing. You refuse to join in the hunt for this guy, and then you appear with him here all of a sudden. You have an empty gun in your hand. This guy has a bullet in him. It don't look good to me!"

" Ever see a six gun?" Kane asked.

" Why, I'm packin' a couple of 'em—three, with yours."

" Oh, is mine a six gun?"

Wilson, with a rather stupid look on his face, drew Kane's gun from his pocket and stared at it.

" Sure, it's a six gun," he said.

" How many shots did you hear altogether?" Kane asked.

Wilson took off his hat and scratched his head. He looked blank.

" Lemme see," he said. " Why, they was several shots, an' then three together, an' then three shots more in answer to ours."

" Six, all told, of the grouped shots, and all from that gun," Kane said. He drew another gun from his pocket. " Here's the second gun Shartel had," he went on. " He tried to kill me with it. You can add it to your collection. Use your noddle a little, Wilson!"

" Who in heck shot this guy, then?" Wilson queried.

" I don't know," Kane answered. " Where did you boys come from? Have you been up to my house?"

" No—the sheriff got a message that you an' this fella was headed in another direction, an' he told me to take these two boys and lope this way. I thought mebbe you'd be hittin' for the river."

"Who was that message from?" Kane asked.

"The sheriff didn't say."

"I left a map—" Kane began.

He broke off abruptly. His eyes swept to the trees from among which the bullets had come. Suddenly his face whitened. He turned and ran toward the trees.

"Hey, you!" Wilson called. "Where you think you're goin'? Come back here, or I'll put a slug into you!"

Kane, halfway to the trees, wheeled on the deputy. His eyes were blazing. Sometimes, he saw, an honest man could be terribly stupid.

"I'm not running away," he cried. "Come after me. Keep me covered, if you like, but don't stop me!"

He turned and sped in among the trees. Wilson lumbered after him.

The deputy had not taken more than a score of steps when he came upon a strange sight. Kane was kneeling, and on his knee rested the head of a young and beautiful woman. She was limp; her face was white; her disordered hair fell about her shoulders. Kane, man hunter of the past, was entreating his beloved wife to speak to him.

Wilson took off his hat, went forward, and knelt beside Bessie, opposite to Kane.

"Don't say she's dead!" the deputy whispered.

"No, not dead," Kane said. "Just fainted. She must have shot Shartel and then gone down in a heap. Get some water, Wilson!"

Wilson ran toward the river.

"My gosh!" he muttered, as if it were past all believing. "I understood that girl was a soft kind of woman. Folks been sayin' she wouldn't last out here — that she'd be stringing Kane back East with her before long. My gosh! Her soft!"

X

Mrs. Thomas Kane lay curled up on the big davenport in the living room of her husband's bungalow. Kane, anxious and fluttering, sat beside her, watching her.

The boys had taken Shartel back to town. Kane had brought Bessie home, after the water had slowly revived her. He had found her horse near by, and she had insisted on riding it, with a return of strength and courage which amazed Kane. However, when they reached the barn, she had swayed in the saddle, and her husband had caught her just in time. She was in a dead faint again.

She had revived once more when Kane bathed her face and hands. After that he heated coffee on the oil stove, and she gulped it, hot and strong. She had wanted to talk immediately, but hitherto Kane had not permitted her to speak.

"Rest," he said. "Just rest. Everything's all right."

Five more minutes passed while Kane fluttered and waited. At the end of that time Bessie sat up tentatively. For a while her head whirled, but she continued in her sitting position. At length she slipped her feet to the floor and sat up straight. She managed to favor her husband with a wan smile.

"There!" she said. "You see I'm quite myself again, Tom."

Kane took her hands in his big brown ones, and held them close.

"You've had a fierce time!" he said.

"See if you can fix the phone," she said. "I tried, but I didn't know how the wires went together where that—that man broke them."

Kane went to the phone and examined it. He was no electrician, but he saw where Shartel's pull had broken the wires. Loose ends protruded from the cord and from the outlet. With his knife he pried up the latter ends, and fastened them to the ends in the cord. He took down the receiver.

"A minute," he said, and to his wife: "Here's the exchange girl. It's working."

"Call the sheriff's office, and see if—if Shartel is—is going to die," she whispered.

Kane put in the call, his eyes on his wife's face. It was very pale again, and her hands were gripping the edge of the davenport. Kane got the sheriff's office, put his question, got a brief answer, and hung up.

"No," he said. "He isn't going to die. Sheriff tells me the doctor says the bullet didn't hit his lung. It's buried in him some place, and will stay there. He'll be in bed for a few days, and then he'll be taken back to the penitentiary."

"Why, can he live with a bullet in him?" Bessie asked anxiously.

"Sure!" Kane answered heartily. "Lots of better men than he is have done that."

Bessie began to waver again. Kane sprang to her side and put his arms about her. She turned her face to his shoulder and began to cry.

"Don't, Bessie!" Kane pleaded. "Don't do that!"

But she cried steadily for some time. Then she straightened up and dried her eyes.

"I feel better now," she said. "I'll tell you what happened."

"No, you rest some more. You're not in shape to talk."

"Yes, I am," Bessie said. "I want to tell you and have done with it. Then we'll forget all about it."

"You certainly go from strong to weak, and back again, faster than anybody I ever saw," declared Kane. "Tell me, if it 'll make you feel better."

"After you and Shartel left the first time, I got out of the window," Bessie said. "I took the other car, and rode over to the Mannings'. From there I phoned to the sheriff. I didn't know where you had gone, of course, and couldn't tell him much, but he said he would start some men out this way. When I got back to the house, I think you must have just left. I knew you had been here, because the doors were unlocked. While I stood staring about the room, wondering what I could do, I caught sight of a scrap of paper crumpled up on the table. I knew it hadn't been there when I left, for I straightened up that table only yesterday. I opened the piece of paper, and found your map. Then I tried to fix the phone, but I couldn't. I knew just where you had gone, for you and I rode to the river over that trail a few weeks ago, you remember. For a few minutes more—perhaps it was only one minute—I still didn't know what to do. Then I remembered about that old gun upstairs. I went up and got it. It was awfully big and dangerous-looking when I took it out of the drawer, but I knew I mustn't think about that. Then I went out, saddled my horse, and rode after you. When I was a little way from the river, I dismounted and went to the edge of the trees on foot. I—I saw that Shartel was trying to kill you."

She closed her eyes, shivering.

"Then you shot Shartel," Kane finished for her.

"I shot Shartel," she said. "Oh, it seemed a long, long time before I could get my hand up with the gun in it! I knew I might kill him, and I didn't know how I could do that. I had to say to myself several times that I must shoot—that I must save you. Finally I fired, and I knew I'd hit Shartel. I fired again, but I guess the other shots must have gone up into the sky, my hand was shaking so. They didn't hit Shartel. It's a wonder one of them didn't hit you. It took the last ounce of my courage to pull that trigger once. When I had fired twice more, I threw the gun as far away as I could, and turned and ran. I was all befuddled. Then I tumbled down, and didn't know any more until I found I was with you."

Without the sound of a sob she began to cry again, her tears flooding her eyes and flowing down her cheeks. Kane picked her up and put her down on the couch.

"Now you rest," he said. "Let's forget this thing!"

The phone rang. Kane answered it. He spoke not at all, only nodding. He turned about to his wife, smiling broadly.

"That was the sheriff," he said. "He told me to present his compliments to you, and he wanted to know if he could come up to supper some night. He said you were a brave little lady, and he was for you all along the line. He told you not to worry about Shartel's dying. Shartel, he said, has begun to curse, and will curse himself well before long. So, you see, Mrs. Thomas, you are standing well with that limb of the law!"

"That's nice," Bessie said. "And what did he say to you for yourself? Did he apologize for what he said last night?"

"He said I was a miserable skunk, no good, not worth bothering about, and no fit companion for decent human beings. He said he didn't see how you could put up with me. He said I was too low down and yellow to be—"

Mrs. Thomas Kane's feet came down on the floor with a bang as she came to an erect position. She looked at her husband with blazing eyes.

"Thomas, you go and saddle a horse, ride down to that sheriff's office, and make him apologize to you for what he just said and for what he said before. Why, if he talks like that, everybody will talk the same way! I won't have it. You go and *make* him apologize, Thomas!"

Mr. Thomas Kane began to laugh. He laughed and laughed, while his wife stared at him. Weakly he dropped into a chair and hid his face in his arms, while his big body rocked.

"Well, I'd like to know what that's about!" Bessie said acidly.

Kane lifted a red face and mopped his brow.

"Honey," he said, "I don't have to *make* the sheriff apologize. He's done apologized already. *That* was an apology!"

"Apology?" Bessie murmured. "It's the funniest apology I ever heard of!"

"Well, you couldn't expect a sheriff to come down off his high horse and say, 'Please forgive me for what I said, Mr. Kane.' That ain't the style among men out here—not for sheriffs or for anybody else. The sheriff just kind of twisted things around and unloosed himself that way to let me know he had made a mistake and was sorry."

"Well," said Mrs. Kane, "then I suppose his compliments to me can be twisted around to mean just the opposite. He was scorning me, was he?"

"Scorning you?" said Kane. "No, ma'am. He knows better 'n that. He knows that when he talks to you, from now on, he's got to give you straight talk. He meant every word he said. It came straight from his heart. He knew he'd better get that line of talk in for you brisk and fast. Otherwise, first time I met him, I'd have knocked his head clean off his shoulders. That sheriff will be your best friend from now on, honey. Every time he sees you, he'll come clean across the street to inquire how you are."

"Won't I be honored, though?" said Mrs. Thomas Kane.

Though her tone was a little dry, her husband noticed that her face held a sort of pleased look.

THE END

BALLADE OF THE LIVING FACE

So much, so fair, has fled away!
  Time gives, then takes it all again—
Faces that smiled yet might not stay,
  Heart against heart held close in vain,
  Shadows and dreams that scarce remain
And greet me with a phantom smile,
  Lost voices in the autumn rain.
Ah, living face, stay yet awhile!

Life's morning turns to evening gray;
  Gone are the heights, the level plain
Slopes toward the ending of the day,
  With far-off music like some strain
  From lands of lovely joy and pain;
And I upon a lonely isle
  Feed with old thoughts my lonely brain.
Ah, living face, stay yet awhile!

A little longer let me lay
  My head betwixt these blossoms twain,
Like April nestling close to May!
  Let me a little longer feign
  The cup is full and still to drain,
That I the shadow may beguile,
  And courage 'gainst the dark sustain!
Ah, living face, stay yet awhile!

ENVOI

Belovèd, thus my loss turns gain,
  And I forget the long exile;
Ah, weary not of my refrain—
  Ah, living face, stay yet awhile!

Richard Le Gallienne

Poison Ivy

A STORY OF THE GOOD AND EVIL IN THE LIFE OF A SMALL AMERICAN TOWN

By Louis Lacy Stevenson

Author of " Big Game," etc.

UNIONVILLE'S best residences were well up on the hill that gradually rose from the river. In that locality large, square brick houses faced ample lawns, and great maples and elms interlaced their branches over the uneven brick sidewalks.

The judge's house stood at the top of the hill. It was a frame house, and not so spacious as some of the others near by; but it stood somewhat aloof from its neighbors, and was surrounded by a stout, high iron fence. In its severe erectness it seemed to be characteristic of the owner himself.

Well south of the square, down by the river, the dwellings were mean. " Nobody lived there," in the expression of the hill, though the river bank had a considerable population. It was not exactly a pleasant place of abode, for the stream, merely a trickle in the hot months, was a raging, yellow torrent in the spring, sweeping away property and marooning human beings. The waters, when they receded, left their dirty imprint on the houses about which they had swirled, and all the structures looked rusty.

Dewey, Squank, and I lived on the hill, but we spent our spare time along the banks of the river. The river boys of our own age resented our presence in their territory, and were remarkably accurate with soft mud and hard stones. Because of frequent encounters, with resultant damage to clothes and bodies, and because of an unreasonable fear of the potentialities of the river, there were parental inhibitions, but the lure of the locality overbalanced the danger of punishment.

An irresistible fascination beckoned us constantly. Our journeys were in the nature of explorations of a strange and hostile land, with curious bits of flotsam—souvenirs of the spring floors—salvaged from the low-flung branches of the willows, as rewards. Then there were strange pools covered with green slime, which we held to be of great depth and inhabited by giant fish. We never verified our beliefs, however, the soft ooze of the banks discouraging such half-hearted investigations as we undertook.

Here and there clumps of willows hid pitfalls in the form of sink holes, these being depressions filled with a black, viscous mass which, boy lore said, would engulf one before help could come, no matter how near at hand it might be. It was while proceeding cautiously through one of these willow screens that we found the Snake Feeder.

Squank, who was in the lead, stopped so suddenly that Dewey and I walked on his heels.

The man was lying on his back, with his mouth open, and bluebottle flies were walking up and down his face. As he seemed oblivious to the tickling of the hairy feet of these insects, and to their stinging bite, we thought him dead, and horror froze us. When our fright had abated sufficiently to clear our vision somewhat, the regular rise and fall of his narrow chest told us that we were in error; so we stood and stared.

The skin on his face was drawn tight, and shone as if varnished. His cheek bones were so prominent that they looked like knobs in white parchment. The bones of his arms could be traced through his sleeves, and those of his legs through his trousers. He was so thin that his head seemed too large for his body. His forehead was high, his hair brown and slightly curly.

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The clothing of the man was not in keeping with the place. It was obviously new, and even we could tell that it was well made. It had been pressed recently, too—a fact which made it patent that he was not a resident of Unionville. His hands, with their long, slender fingers, were so white and clean that the faint blue vein etchings showed clearly. We acquired all these details in several minutes of silent and intent study.

Drawing back a little way, boylike, we caucused on what had brought him down there. We debated what sudden disaster had caused such a wealthy man to be sleeping on the river bank with bluebottle flies crawling over his face, his head only a few inches from the muddy edge of a green-scummed pool, and his hands almost among the poison ivy vines.

The solution was advanced at last by Dewey—a simple explanation in which Squank and I concurred hurriedly, with inward regret at not having thought of it first, since such happenings were not uncommon in Unionville.

"He's drunk," was what Dewey said.

We didn't waste any further consideration on him, there being nothing wonderful in such a condition. Nor did we disturb him, our experience having been that such acts sometimes brought unpleasant consequences; but we did speculate as to whether we should tell Gabriel White.

Not that we felt any obligation to the tall, hard-built, hard-muscled, hard-bitten town marshal, whose reputation as a sleuth was great in our minds. No, he had interfered too often and too successfully with certain of our activities. While we had never quite accomplished the calaboose, Gabriel White caused us to infer that our liberty was due only to the fact that he had a heart. Doubting the existence of such an organ in his straight up-and-down frame, we felt that we owed him no great amount of loyalty.

The argument subsiding, we tiptoed back for another look, while a blue jay screamed raucously and a kingfisher abandoned the dead limb from which it had been keeping watch over a riffle.

"He's as thin as a snake feeder," said Squank, after a long survey of the recumbent man.

So the newcomer was named after those harmless but formidable-looking insects, sometimes called devil's darning needles, which flit over ponds and pools, with heads apparently too large for their slender bodies. Later, others in Unionville saw the similarity, and in after days, when the Snake Feeder became a familiar figure around the square, there were those who called him that to his face.

We discussed the matter of a report further as we climbed the easy Main Street hill. Our attitude was entirely selfish. We were unanimous in the opinion that to herald to the law the advent of such a stranger would elevate us above our fellows, and thus give us desirable prominence.

Opposed to this was an entirely human desire for obscurity at this time. A certain badly aimed brick, which had missed its target and gone through the glass roof of Sorenson's greenhouse, had a great deal of bearing on our attitude. Revelation of this accident would certainly have unpleasant reactions in our homes.

Despite this, we wavered when we saw Gabriel White standing in the west door of the courthouse. The courthouse had once been a dignified thing of red brick and massive native stone columns; but it had been profaned—columns and all—by a coat of drab paint, now well stained by the residue of burned natural gas, as if the chimneys had endeavored to protest at the lack of artistic sense shown by those responsible for the painting.

White looked so ominous in his blue uniform, and his star gleamed so brightly, that we hurried on our way. Consequently, the introduction of the Snake Feeder to Unionville was delayed until Saturday, the day on which Unionville always had most of its dramatics.

It was on Saturday that the hitching racks around the square showed no vacant places. It was Saturday when the best runaways and fights occurred. It was on Saturday that the saloons along the South Side—a sordid row, even more drab than the courthouse at which they leered—were jammed with men whose language was profane and high-pitched, and who became more and more quarrelsome as the hour grew later.

Dewey, Squank, and I were engaged in our usual Saturday afternoon avocation, peddling bills. The work necessitated visiting all the buggies around the square. An advertisement was thrust into the rear of each vehicle, presumably to be read when the driver reached his home, but more often to be lost along the way or ruined by what was placed upon it, the contents of jugs having a tendency to escape when the stopper is a corncob.

We paused when we reached the center of the row along the South Side, choosing our halting place with care and discretion, experience having taught us the best point for observation.

Just as we stopped, an emaciated figure came out of the Good Luck, the largest and most ornate of the saloons. At the door he wiped his mouth with a white handkerchief, though patrons of such establishments usually used a coat sleeve or the back of a hand.

"The Snake Feeder!" exclaimed Squank.

He leaned against the iron railing that guarded the areaway. Those about him were men only, for no respectable woman ever set foot on the South Side.

As we stood there, waiting for any excitement that might be our fortune, a country woman passed from the pavement alongside the courthouse, and, working her way through the closely packed buggies, went into the street. Straight on she went, braving the profanity, the fumes of cheap tobacco, cheap liquor, and the staleness of unclean drinking places, together with the still more unclean looks and remarks, until she clutched the arm of a man.

"Go 'way!" he commanded thickly, reeling in clumsy resistance to her effort to take him from his companions.

Some one laughed, and we joined in the mirth. To us it was good comedy; but the Snake Feeder, standing in the background, didn't laugh. Instead, his face grew hard. When the woman's eyes filled with tears as she pleaded, he stepped forward, his hat in his hand.

"I believe, madam, you want your husband to accompany you?" he asked, a peculiar softness in his voice.

"Yes," she answered, her tone defiant. Then she looked into his face, and her attitude changed instantly. "We have to get home—the children are alone," she continued hurriedly. "Lew got drunk last Saturday and spent every cent he had. I had to put up the team and do the chores. He's a good man when he's sober, but last Saturday he struck—"

She was choked by tears.

"Aw, come on, Lew, le's have 'nother lil snifter!" pleaded a young fellow, catching the man's coat sleeve.

The answer was returned by the Snake Feeder, and in a manner that was astounding, for we did not believe that such a bag of bones could have so much strength. His bony fist shot out and caught the loafer under the chin. The fellow struck the bricks so hard that he lay with his legs twitching.

"Do you love your husband?" asked the Snake Feeder, calmly turning his back on his handiwork.

"Yes," she said softly, her face getting red.

"Then, by God, he'll go with you, if I have to throw him into his wagon!"

"I'll go, stranger," answered Lew, who seemed to become sober the instant the Snake Feeder turned toward him. "Come on, Emma!"

The Snake Feeder bowed and stepped back. Arm in arm, the couple crossed the street, the husband walking as straight as if he had not taken a drink that day. The Snake Feeder watched them with a curious look on his face—a look which we interpreted as sad.

Gabriel White pushed his way through the crowd that had collected.

"The Snake Feeder is going to get arrested," said Squank.

But the marshal paid no attention to the Snake Feeder. Instead, he jerked the prostrate loafer to his feet, said something to him that we could not hear, and pushed him through the crowd. The loafer couldn't have been hurt very badly, though he had a lump on his head, for he disappeared speedily.

The Snake Feeder just stood there without making a move until Lew picked up the lines and backed his team away from the rack. Then the Snake Feeder went back into the Good Luck.

Dewey, Squank, and I waited a long time, though we should have hurried our task to completion, not only to collect the quarter due to each of us, but, what was more important to us, to invest the total sum satisfactorily in fishing tackle that we had coveted for many days.

But the Snake Feeder did not reappear.

II

THE judge was a hard man—hard as the monuments in the cemetery, my grandfather said to my Uncle Henry. Uncle Henry had come up from Cincinnati, and was sitting on the front porch with grandfather. I was digging weeds out of the front walk.

The judge had just passed, and had returned my grandfather's greeting with a grave nod. He was not tall, but he seemed to be, and the way he walked gave an impression of power and strength. His mustache—shot freely with white, though grandfather said he was only a little past forty—was neatly stiff and unbending. He had eyes like the monuments to which my grandfather had referred—gray and cold.

The judge was the only man in Unionville who was never called by his first name. No one had ever seen the judge smile, and no one had ever seen the dignity that surrounded him ruffled in the slightest. He accepted the respect that the town gave him as his right.

"His name is Gilbert Browne," continued my grandfather, when Uncle Henry asked him a question. "He came here about fifteen years ago, from Chicago. He was just as cold and dignified then as he is now, though at first he could get only small cases; but it didn't take Unionville long to find out that he knew more law than any one else in town. His advice was always sound, and he never took a case unless he believed his client was right. The result was that one year, when there was a vacancy on the Republican ticket, he was asked to take the nomination. True, they didn't know much about him, but it looked as if the Democrats were going to make a clean sweep—this county swings one way and then another, you know—so it didn't make any real difference, the committee thought; but he was elected by a small majority, it being a Republican year, after all.

"Right after he was elected we found out one thing—he wouldn't play politics. If a man was guilty, he received the same kind of a sentence whether he was a member of the party or not. There were complaints, of course. When useful workers were sent to prison, some of the party leaders took the matter up with the judge, but they did it only once. The sentence was the same, too, whether the guilty one lived here on the hill or down by the river—generally the limit of the law."

"Pretty hard on some poor devils, wasn't it? Or has he changed?" inquired Uncle Henry.

"He hasn't changed, and Unionville doesn't look at it as you do. The judge has been elected by a bigger majority every time he has had to run. He's as hard as emery, but he's just. At the last election even I jeopardized my standing as a Democrat by voting for him."

My uncle was silent. That was news to me, because I never thought that my grandfather could see the least good in any Republican. Indeed, the judge must be a mighty man!

I speeded up my weeding. If I could escape in time, I would find Dewey and Squank, and we would sneak into the court. The judge was going to sentence Mike Johnson that morning. Mike had knifed another man, and had submitted to arrest only after Gabriel White had broken a club over his head. I believed there would be such a crowd that we would not be observed, Gabriel White having a prejudice against boys in the court room.

"Is the judge married?" asked Uncle Henry.

"No, he doesn't seem to have any use for women," answered my grandfather. "When some poor drab comes up before him, he always sends her to the workhouse. He lives up there all alone, except for a colored housekeeper. Martha Green, the housekeeper, keeps pretty much to herself, also. There aren't many negroes here, and they stick close together, but except for going to church on Sunday she never mingles with members of her race. She's a skinny, thin-lipped woman, the blackest in town."

I surveyed the work done, and concluded I could make an escape without causing too much talk when I returned. I was just oozing out as privately as possible when I saw Charlie Mechant.

Charlie was the teller in the Union National Bank. He was slender and graceful, and his black hair was always parted just exactly right. When a new style was shown in Rosenroth's window, it was always after Charlie had ordered that same kind of a suit. He was the one who introduced the new dance steps in town. Dewey, Squank, and I thought him a sissy, but all the girls liked him.

Dewey, Squank, and I liked Tom Spiers a lot better. Tom also worked in the Union National. He and Charlie started in as bookkeepers, and Charlie had been promoted, while Tom hadn't.

That made Dewey, Squank, and me pretty mad, when we heard it. We were patrons of the Union National, depositing ten cents a week there under the sternest kind of family compulsion, and by making almost unbelievable sacrifices. We had a big notion to transfer our accounts to the Farmers' Savings; but before taking action, we asked Tom about it.

"Well, I guess they picked the better man, boys," he said, so we left our three dollars and twenty cents apiece there.

At the same time we resolved that if we ever got a chance to help him with Nelly Miller, we would surely do so. We thought Nelly was the prettiest girl in town. She had black hair and black eyes, and when she smiled she showed white, even teeth. One time we saw her in an evening gown—a pink one with a low neck, which showed her full, rounded throat and her white skin, and I said she looked like a queen.

"I think I'll have to tell Mamie Merrill about that," said Squank, and I shut up, because I didn't like to be teased about Mamie Merrill.

Nelly Miller couldn't decide whether she preferred Charlie Mechant or Tom Spiers.

"Have you finished, boy?" asked grandfather, as I was going quietly through the gate to see what Charlie Mechant wanted.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Good!" said Charlie. "I want you to take a note to Miss Miller for me."

I was about to tell him I wouldn't do it, but he held out a dime with the envelope. As that money would save me a lot of trouble with my banking, I took it, and ran over to Nelly's house.

"No answer," she said, after she had read it; "but here's some chewing gum for you."

She was always like that.

I found Dewey and Squank, and we got into the court room without the marshal catching us. We slipped in among the crowd of men until we got to a place where we could see the judge on the bench and Mike in the pen where they kept the prisoners. He was handcuffed, and his face was twisted in an ugly scowl. On the table beside the lawyers was the big knife with which he had done the cutting. The blade was rusty, and we thought the discoloration was dried blood.

"You have been found guilty of the crime of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm," said the judge, after he had ordered Mike to stand up. "Have you anything to say in your own behalf before I pronounce sentence?"

Mike shook his shaggy head, his hard, mottled eyes on the judge.

"Five years in the State penitentiary."

Mike just stood there. Then a wicked gleam came into those hard eyes, and, before any one could move, he leaped over the low railing and grabbed the knife.

I could feel my heart in my throat, but the judge did not change color. Instead, as the man rushed toward him, he leaped to his feet and braced himself, his fists clenching. One more step, and Mike would be on him!

A terrific report tore my ears, and the knife dropped from Mike's fingers. Gabriel White had shot from the hip, but his aim was true. As he fired, he jumped, and bore the prisoner to the floor. I could not see what was happening, but it seemed only a second before Mike was back in the prisoner's box, one hand hanging limp and strangely twisted, with blood dripping from a purple hole.

Every one was tense with excitement. No, there were two cool persons—Gabriel White and the judge. The judge resumed his seat, and was as calm as if he was sitting in his pew in the First Presbyterian Church and the organ was playing. Dewey, Squank, and I were perspiring, but there were no beads on his forehead.

Men milled around, but Gabriel White quieted them. This done, he made Mike stand up once more.

"Michael Johnson," said the judge evenly, "I will amend your sentence. The limit of the law is ten years. You will serve ten years at hard labor. Officer, remove the prisoner!"

Gabriel White led Johnson out.

"If there are no further cases, court will stand adjourned for to-day," we heard the judge say, as we followed the chattering and gibbering Mike to the calaboose, where he would be held until he was taken to Columbus.

If there was any nervousness in the judge's voice, we could not detect it. We agreed that he was the bravest man in town.

We were coming back from the city prison, which was in the back of the engine house, when we saw the Snake Feeder leaving the Good Luck, and, as usual, wiping his mouth with a white handkerchief. Not yet surfeited with excitement, we followed him, memories of the encounter with the loafer uppermost in our minds.

The Snake Feeder walked as far as the courthouse fence and then stopped, leaning against the iron pickets, and looking at the South Side with an expression of contempt on his face. His breath smelled strongly of whisky, but his hands and face were clean, and when he walked he did not stagger. He only rested for a moment and then went on.

The judge, with his usual dignity, was passing through the iron gate leading from the courthouse yard to the sidewalk. Other pedestrians were giving him the right of way, that being the custom. Despite the fact that he had faced death only a few moments before, his cheeks were full of color and his step was springy.

The instant he passed through the gate, the Snake Feeder reached it, and the two men met face to face. Both stopped. The Snake Feeder smiled a mirthless smile, his thin lips drawn tightly against his teeth; but all the blood left the ruddy face of the judge, and he staggered back against a big maple tree. He seemed to go to ruin in an instant, and to shrink until the Snake Feeder towered over him.

Dewey, Squank, and I were thunderstruck at the sight. Just a little while before the judge, barehanded and unarmed, had stood straight and undaunted before the rush of a man in whose hand was a knife, and in whose eyes was murder; and now he was cowering before a mere skeleton of a man, who only smiled!

"You?" questioned the judge, after a few moments of silence, his voice husky and lacking in resonance.

"Yes, I," answered the Snake Feeder, something in his tone giving us the creeps.

With the words, his smile vanished, and in its place came hate—hate concentrated, hate that took away all humanness.

The judge's lips moved, but no words came, and he shrank back more closely against the tree.

"It's been a long search," continued the Snake Feeder, his voice cold and metallic; "but it's the end of the trail now!"

"Yes." The judge's assent was faint.

"I've been keeping alive just for one thing!"

As he said that, the Snake Feeder moved forward slightly, like a cat stalking its prey, his long, thin fingers contracting into hawklike talons ready to clutch; and the judge seemed to grow even smaller.

"But you're too late," he croaked.

"You lie!" screamed the Snake Feeder, his arm raised to strike.

We expected to see the judge knocked down, a thing in our eyes almost as monstrous as spitting at the throne of the Almighty; but the blow did not descend. The Snake Feeder's thin arm was caught in the stout grip of Gabriel White. Roughly the town marshal jerked the Snake Feeder to one side, and spoke the order:

"Come with me"—a command that meant the calaboose.

"I'll strip that man to his dirty hide, and show this town what he really is!" shouted the Snake Feeder. "I'll—"

A fit of coughing broke his words. He strangled and became limp, red bubbles issuing from his mouth.

"Let him go, Gabriel," commanded the judge, still in that strange, strained voice.

The town marshal contemptuously half dragged, half carried, the Snake Feeder to a drinking fountain. Four of these horrible iron barbarities were firmly fastened to the four corners of the square. At one of them he washed the Snake Feeder's face with one hand, supporting the man's body with the other. Then he dashed water into the Snake Feeder's face.

The Snake Feeder did not open his eyes until the judge had been gone for several minutes.

"I'm all right now," he said, the choke gone out of his voice.

"Can you handle yourself?" Gabriel White asked.

"Certainly."

The officer released his hold, and the Snake Feeder staggered, controlled himself with an effort, and walked away slowly, his head held high, his body erect and untrembling, but his face as white as plaster.

Straight to the Good Luck he went and we saw him no more that day.

III

After supper, my father and Uncle Henry went down town to get some cigars, leaving my grandfather smoking his pipe on the front porch.

I sat on the steps, thinking of what I had seen. I couldn't think of anything else. The encounter between Judge Browne and the Snake Feeder, and its effect on the judge, had so affected Dewey, Squank, and me that we didn't talk much about it on the way home; but I felt that I must discuss it with somebody or else burst.

"Do you know the Snake Feeder, grandfather?" I asked suddenly.

"What's that?" he replied, his hand to his ear, he being a little deaf on that side. "Move over closer, boy."

"Do you know the Snake Feeder?" I repeated, sliding nearer to his chair and around on his good ear side.

"I know everybody in town, but I never heard of such a man. Who is he, and what about him?"

I told grandfather how Dewey, Squank, and I had found the Snake Feeder down on the river bank—grandfather had no objection to my prowling along the river—and about the Snake Feeder meeting the judge, and how the judge had cringed.

"Strange!" muttered grandfather, at the end of my somewhat incoherent recital. "And the judge knew the man you call the Snake Feeder?"

"Yes, sir, I'm sure he did," I answered confidently, for I recalled the whiteness of the judge's face, the laxness of the stern jaw, and his gasped interrogation of "You?"

"Possibly your Snake Feeder is some criminal whom the judge has sentenced, and who has come back for revenge."

"Oh, no, sir! The judge wasn't frightened when Mike Johnson jumped at him with a knife, and the Snake Feeder didn't have any weapon in his hand."

Grandfather had heard all about that from my father, who had been there, and he had read about it in the *Daily News;* but he was surprised when he found out that I had been in the court room. He made me tell him all I had seen.

He was silent when I stopped. It was twilight, and, seeing that he had forgotten all about me in puzzling over what he had learned, I slipped away. I wanted to walk by Mamie Merrill's house, because she might be on the front porch alone, and then I would have a chance to tell her, too. Dewey and Squank wouldn't catch me, because they had gone driving with their folks.

Mamie's father and mother were driving, too, and we sat on the front porch and talked. The shadows from the maples, in which the locusts were shrilling, made it so dark that while we could see everybody who passed, nobody could see us; and by and by we were sitting close together.

Charlie Mechant and Nelly Miller passed. She had his arm, and both were laughing. I knew then what the note had been about, and I felt sorry for Tom Spiers.

"He's too slow, anyway," said Mamie. "He doesn't dance!"

I didn't, either. I resolved to learn as soon as possible, and I told Mamie of my intention. She was pleased, and said she would teach me when it got cooler. I moved over still nearer to her. I don't know what happened to me, but that was when I made up my mind that as soon as I got long pants—which wouldn't be long now—I would marry Mamie. I was going to tell her about it, but every time I started something came up in my throat, and my knees felt funny, so I didn't.

Even though it was dark, I knew how pretty she was. Her brown hair curled, and her brown eyes had a glint in them just like pure agates. Her hands were slender and white, and gave me a queer feeling when I touched them. If I had only washed more carefully before I left home!

I thought I had been there only about a minute when I heard their clock strike nine. I got up to go. If I wasn't in bed by sharp half past, there would be more weeds to pull, and I was sick of weeds. Our front walk had more dandelions and plantains than any other walk in the world, and mother was fussy about keeping them down.

Mamie walked to the gate with me, but I didn't stop. I was afraid to. I wanted to kiss her!

On the way home, I passed Nelly Miller's house. She and Charlie Mechant were sitting on the front porch, and I'm sure they were holding hands. It being near the first of the month, Tom Spiers was working down in the bank. An uneasy thought came over me; but then Mamie Merrill wasn't that kind of a girl!

I went through the alley, and tried to get in the back way, but the screen was hooked, and I had to come around to the front porch. Father and Uncle Henry were waiting for me. Grandfather had told them what Dewey, Squank, and I had seen, and they were eager to hear all about it. In the dark it seemed more exciting than in the daytime, and they had so many questions to ask that it was ten o'clock before father ordered me to bed.

I couldn't go to sleep for a long time, because I could see so many things in the dark. When I finally dropped off, I dreamed that Gabriel White was taking the

Snake Feeder to the calaboose, and I knew that the prisoner had been arrested for killing the judge. So vivid was the dream that it awakened me, and I was scared. I could hear all kinds of strange noises in the house, and I felt as if I was suffocating.

Through the branches of the climbing rose that covered my window I could see the faint gleams from the arc light on the corner. The beams gave me courage, and I got up and pushed aside the vines, hoping to get some air.

The night breeze was pleasing to my heated body, and I stood there looking out at the street. I must have been asleep much longer than I thought, for the clock in the dining room downstairs struck midnight. That was very late for Unionville, and I couldn't hear a sound. Undoubtedly the whole town was in bed and asleep.

The bright moonlight made the night like a silvery day. Directly in my line of vision was a great Scotch elm that stood before the Episcopal church—a tree so large and so old that its branches reached across the small lot and caressed the little brick structure.

Quaint and peculiar was the architecture of that church. The entrance was screened from the street by a brick wall, which formed a vestry open at both ends. In this wall were three windows—a large one in the center, and, higher up, one on each side, two smaller ones. All three were arched, and the trio, in the minds of the imaginative, took on the semblance of a face, the large window being the nose and mouth and the two smaller ones the eyes.

Something held my gaze to the deep shadow cast by the elm. As I peered, I felt gooseflesh coming on me. I thought I saw some one lurking there!

Held by an irresistible attraction, I strained my eyes, half believing that I was dreaming again. Then I saw a man emerge.

His face gleamed white in the moonlight, and, to my surprise, I recognized the intruder. It was the Snake Feeder!

He walked stiffly toward the church, his steps jerky, as if he was being drawn along by a force stronger than himself. At the church steps he started to kneel, but pulled himself up sharply. Stepping back, he shook his fist at the windows.

"I can't do it!" he muttered, his words distinct in the silence. "Don't look at me with those accusing eyes! You made me stop here! You put the thought of prayer in my mind, and now, oh, my God, I can't do it!"

Holding his hands over his face, the Snake Feeder staggered back until his feet were off the church lot. Then he broke into a crazy zigzag run toward the South Side.

I laughed.

"He's drunk," I thought. "He's drunk, and he takes that wall with the windows for a face!"

In the morning I said nothing of what I had seen. It didn't seem real, and I thought it might have been a dream, for what would the Snake Feeder be doing up on the hill?

Never once did it occur to me that to reach the house of the judge he would have to pass the little brick church with the three windows resembling a grotesque mask.

IV

Dewey, Squank, and I were looking for the Snake Feeder when we encountered Gabriel White. He stopped us, and talked to us about the broken glass in Sorenson's greenhouse. We didn't question him as to why he considered us guilty. We knew we were, and believed that he knew, though he didn't accuse us directly. He merely told us that if we didn't mend our ways, we would probably end up in the Reform School.

None of the sermons of Dr. Boone, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church, made half the impression that that talk did. Dr. Boone preached about hell, and, though his pulpit pictures were vivid, they did not seem real. We did not know any one who had gone to hell; but we did know Otis Roscoe, who had been to the Reform School. He had told us some of the things that happened to boys there.

At that moment Otis Roscoe was in jail again, and the chances were that he would be sent to the penitentiary.

"You should see Sorenson, and fix it up with him," said the marshal, in conclusion.

We didn't want to, but we took his advice. It was far easier to face Sorenson than to face Gabriel White.

The florist took the matter under advisement for several minutes.

"You say it was an accident?" he asked.

"Yes," we answered.

"Well, if you boys will help me clean up around here for the next three days, I'll call it square," he said.

That was reasonable indeed, though this

employment almost made us miss the big riot on the South Side.

John Lucas came down from the Marsh, sold his onions, and went on a spree. A mountain of a man, he raged up and down the South Side, knocking out of his way any one he encountered, and screaming threats of what he would do when he met Gabriel White.

Heads were thrust out of second story windows all around the square. Gabriel White was in a distant part of Unionville, but the news reached him, and he drove up, with his horse foaming. Getting out of the buggy with no unnecessary motions, he hitched the tired animal and stepped across the street. Lucas was in front of the Good Luck, swinging his fists.

"I hear you are looking for me," the marshal said quietly, without drawing his pistol or his club.

"I'll break you in two!" shouted Lucas.

A fist, which looked as large as the bucket of a dredge boat, shot forward. White ducked the blow easily, and, instead of striking back, endeavored to catch Lucas by the elbow.

"No, you don't!" cried the giant, pulling free. "You might be able to arrest common men, but not me! I'm king of the Marsh!"

He launched another terrible blow, which grazed the officer's cheek. As he struck, he lunged, and his stovepipe arms clutched in an embrace which seemingly made White's bones crack.

Gabriel White, built straight up and down like a pole, wriggled free and struck out with his left, the blow landing just under Lucas's eye with a smack. Lucas only laughed—or, rather, snarled. His arms swinging like the vanes of a windmill, he closed in, and he and White traded blows—blows generally ineffective, because they were blocked. Then White landed again under the other eye, and Lucas staggered back a trifle.

That gave the marshal an advantage. He was not carrying the weight his opponent was, and he danced about, dodging the other man's flail-like arms, and striking Lucas again and again low on the body, the impact of the blows sounding like beating on a hollow log.

Maddened, Lucas rushed again. As he did so, White slipped on a wet place in the sidewalk. Before the marshal could recover his balance, Lucas was on him. Both of White's arms were pinioned, but his attacker had one free, and with it he struck the marshal in the face time after time, blood following each blow.

The crowd, ringed about the combatants, cheered. Gabriel White, whose record of taking his man without assistance had stood for years, was about to be dethroned!

But once more—how he did it we did not know—Gabriel White eeled free. In a flash, his fist landed just below Lucas's left ear, and the giant lifted from his feet and fell backward like a chopped tree.

For a second the loafers were stupefied; then, with a yell, they attacked White from all sides. They had seen him all but knocked out by one man, and they believed that they could overwhelm him with numbers. Many a man in that crowd had felt the weight of the marshal's club, and some he had thrust into the calaboose, and they were thirsting for revenge. With what Lucas had accomplished, they thought that their time was at hand.

White disappeared in a whirl of shouting, cursing men; but only for a moment. He came up with his club free, and the stout hickory rose and fell again and again. Every time it descended, a man went to the bricks.

The number of attackers did not decrease, for men poured out of the saloons and replaced those who were disabled; but still the marshal stood erect, fighting with fist and club. We could see that he was trying to work around until his back would be against the front of the Good Luck.

Dewey, Squank, and I were thrilled at the sight. It was the best fight we had ever seen, and we enjoyed it thoroughly. Then, suddenly, we wanted to scream a warning. Gabriel White was no particular friend of ours, but he represented the law. He was the man who kept the peace in Unionville, and the town respected him. Moreover, he was one man fighting many, and sneaking up behind him was a ruffian with a steel crowbar.

Gabriel White's cap had been knocked off long ago. His slightly bald head was bare to the impending blow, and we stood there tongue-tied!

Then came a newcomer into the fight—a heavy, bloodless man, the Snake Feeder, and he ranged himself on the side of the law. His fist, with a sound like a slap, struck the face of the man with the crowbar. The fellow dropped.

Seizing the iron and prodding his way with it, the Snake Feeder reached the marshal's side. There was a light in his eyes that made men give him room.

Before Dewey, Squank, and I could quite realize it, the fight was over. Those in the rear turned away first, and those in front gave back until the sidewalk was practically clear. Then Gabriel White, his face speckled and blotched, his hands bruised, and his club crimson almost its entire length, arrested Lucas and lugged him off to the calaboose, with a big protuberance purpling slowly on his head. Men with blood on their faces went into the saloons, or washed themselves at the drinking fountains, and the South Side settled back to normal.

It was almost a week later that we encountered Gabriel White. Aside from a black eye, he was all right, and he smiled at us.

" So you saw Sorenson," he said. " That was the straight thing to do, boys. I'm proud of you, and I don't believe it's necessary to tell your folks about it."

We three felt happy. A big load was off our minds. Also we revised our opinion of Gabriel White to a great extent, and understood why he was so popular in Unionville—except among the rough element, which didn't amount to anything, anyway. Taken all in all, we appreciated Gabriel, and felt that Unionville should be proud to have an officer like him.

But it was on circus day that he reached the highest point in my admiration. Dewey and Squank and all the other boys I knew went into the big tent early, but I stood outside alone. So far as I was concerned, the parade would be all that I could see, and this was the only circus coming that year.

It was a period of deep financial embarrassment with me. In a moment of overconfidence I had bought a brass reel for my fishing rod, believing that I could easily earn another quarter; but odd jobs, with their nickels and dimes, had never been so scarce. Bitterly indeed did I repent the lure of that window on Michigan Street, just south of the square, as I saw all Unionville going through the main entrance of the circus.

My home standing was such that I had not even wasted breath by making an appeal for funds. On three evenings in succession I had vanished without watering the lawn. True, I had important things to attend to. There was much that I had to talk over with Mamie Merrill, but I couldn't give that as an excuse.

So I stood there, the loneliest boy in Unionville. I saw Nelly Miller go in with Tom Spiers, and even the knowledge that Charlie Mechant would have to do Tom's work in addition to his own, because Tom had taken an afternoon off, did not cheer me. Then I saw Mamie go in with her father, and I wanted to sink through the ground. She would think I was a cheap skate, and I would never be able to face her again.

The band struck up the opening number—the one just before all the circus people and the animals march around the ring in the " grand triumphal entry." Hope was ended, but I couldn't leave.

" Going in, sonny?" asked some one.

I looked up, and there stood Gabriel White in his best uniform, his shoes brilliant with polish. I could feel my face getting redder and redder. Even my ears burned as I shook my head. I wanted to tell him of my plight, but I couldn't.

I didn't have to. The marshal took me by the hand, and the doorkeeper smiled and passed us in. Another man handed Gabriel White two pieces of cardboard, and an usher took us to reserved seats right in front of the ring.

It was the best circus I ever saw. The clowns did their funniest tricks in front of where we sat, and Gabriel White bought peanuts and lemonade. As I sat there, thoroughly happy, I understood why Gabriel White had been the marshal for so long, why at each successive election he got more votes, and why everybody in Unionville felt safe while he represented the law.

Dewey and Squank were away over to one side, on the blue seats, which were only boards. Mamie Merrill and her father were at one end, where they couldn't see all the acts. Tom Spiers and Nelly Miller had reserved seats, but they weren't half as good as ours.

I was so proud and happy that I believed I could lick any one who didn't like Gabriel White—that is, every one except Will Wilson, who hated the marshal.

V

Will Wilson hated Gabriel White with the intensity of a conscienceless man whose living is threatened.

Gabriel White had no diffidence about going into Wilson's gambling room when some poor man was being cheated, making Wilson disgorge, and keeping the place closed as long as possible. The fact that White was the only man in Unionville who dared do such a thing hurt worse than it would have otherwise.

Unionville was tolerant of Will Wilson. Various mayors took the attitude that gambling was to be endured along with flies and other evils, and that, such being the case, Wilson might as well have the privilege of fleecing his fellow townsmen as any one else. Wilson was always a heavy contributor to the campaign fund of the " liberal " candidate, and there was a general disposition on the part of politicians to stand in with him. He had many friends, hangers-on, or adherents—generally those whose notes he held—and they voted as he said.

I knew this because I had often heard my father and grandfather talk about it. Dewey and Squank knew it because they heard the folks discuss it.

So Will Wilson flourished, with only Gabriel White as a check. Despite the marshal, Wilson would stand by the stairway leading to his " gambling hell," as my mother called it, on the South Side, his black hair shining, his black mustache waxed at the ends into tight little rolls, and his gray suit, with its pin stripe of red, as near " form fitting " as the best tailor in Lima could make it.

Dewey, Squank, and I always watched Will Wilson, for he possessed the fascination that evil has for adolescence. We saw him nod to various persons as they passed, and to some he spoke. Those addressed usually climbed the stairway.

When five or six had gone up, Wilson ceased to be a black spider at the entrance to his web, and disappeared. The game was " on." On Saturday night the six tables were always filled, and he did not need to extend invitations.

We tried to make our deposits in the Union National on Monday morning, because it was then that Wilson turned over to Charlie Mechant a great roll of bills, and we enjoyed seeing the teller leaf through them and enter the total in a long yellow book. We were frankly envious. If we had only one of those deposits, we believe that there would be enough to purchase safety bicycles for all three of us.

The Monday after Gabriel White took me to the circus, we followed Will Wilson into the bank as closely as we dared. While Charlie was counting the bills, Wilson stood there silent; but when the entry was made and blotted, and the pass book handed back and stowed away in Wilson's inside vest pocket, he asked:

" Be up as usual to-night, Charlie?"

" I'll be there with bells on, Will," the teller answered confidently, after he had looked about to see that none of the bank's officials were within hearing distance.

Dewey, Squank, and I didn't attach any importance to that remark. In fact, we forgot all about it, our minds being fixed on a fishing trip that had been delayed by our interest in Will Wilson. Squank had heard about a wonderful hole three miles up the river, and we had our tackle all ready.

Judge Browne was coming into the bank as Wilson was going out, and Wilson nodded and spoke. The judge, however, walked in as if he hadn't seen the gambler, and Wilson scowled.

" Wonder what the judge would do to Wilson if he ever was up in front of him?" asked Dewey guardedly.

" Give him about a million years in jail," replied Squank. " I wonder what he would do if the Snake Feeder was in front of him?"

We couldn't answer that, but we turned back to look at the judge. He was the same as ever, all dignity, and the bank president himself was attending to his deposit; but in our eyes he seemed much older than he had looked before he met the Snake Feeder.

The fishing hole was even better than we expected. Late as we were, we each caught a good mess of sunfish—sunfish so big that our fathers couldn't say they were only good enough to grease the pan with. We never could see any humor in that remark, though our fathers always laughed at it.

Our success caused us to resolve to visit this hole, which we named the Old Sycamore, every time we had a chance, and to guard its location with great secrecy, because we knew what happened to holes that became too popular.

For some time we went up there whenever we could. Consequently, we only caught glimpses of the Snake Feeder, but I saw the judge almost every day as he walked past our house on his way down town. Sometimes I saw him coming home late in the evening, and almost always Gabriel White was with him.

One night, when we were alone, I asked my grandfather if he had heard why the judge had seemed to be so much afraid of the Snake Feeder.

"I don't know that he is," said grandfather. "I can't find out anything about it. Maybe Gabriel White knows, but he won't say anything. Different from the rest of the people in this town, Gabriel is. Judging by the company he keeps, your Snake Feeder doesn't amount to much. Anyway, I can't believe the judge is afraid of him."

"Then why does Gabriel White walk home with him whenever he stays down town until after dark?"

"I don't know," remarked grandfather, tapping the floor with his cane—which meant that he didn't want to be bothered any more.

I went over to Mamie Merrill's, and we talked about it for a long time. We talked about other things, too, and when it got dark, I held her hand! It was a soft, uneasy little hand, but it never quite slipped from my fingers. My heart fairly fluttered, and I wished it was fall, so that I could have my long trousers.

I got home just one minute ahead of time, and was in bed when my mother made her usual inspection. If I hadn't been, I couldn't have gone fishing the next morning. It was my lucky evening!

Dewey and Squank were lucky, too, and we were all happy as we walked along the river bank, until we heard some one coughing in the willows. It was a tearing, hacking cough, violent at first, then growing fainter and fainter.

Squank parted the bushes, and we saw the Snake Feeder lying on the ground, red foam coming from his lips. Remembering what Gabriel White had done, we filled our caps and bathed the Snake Feeder's face; but it was a long time before he opened his blue eyes and saw three gray-countenanced boys bending over him. We thought he was gone.

He smiled and tried to sit up, but he was too weak. Dewey, who was the biggest of us, lifted him, and we moved him over against a willow. After panting a little while, he reached into his trousers pocket and brought out three silver dollars. In those days a dollar looked as big around as the head of a bass drum.

"If you will do me the honor to accept it, I would like the pleasure of bestowing this trash on my rescuers," he said, speaking with difficulty, but with a twinkle in his eyes. "I have met you three gentlemen somewhere before, but your identity escapes me for the moment. Oh, yes—now I recall the time and the environment. It was the day when I encountered your most estimable judge, and when your efficient but somewhat rough town marshal restrained me from a rash and violent act. Some day, when I know him better, I hope to convey my thanks to him for that."

"But you saved him that day on the square, when those loafers were trying to beat him up."

"So you saw that, too? Ubiquitous boys, indeed! That was merely another impulse, so I deserve no credit. Why dwell on it? Instead, we'll dismiss the subject and revert to the one of recompense for the service you have just rendered me."

He got to his feet stiffly and thrust the three dollars toward us. We held back, not because we didn't want such wealth, but because it didn't seem quite right to take it. Undoubtedly he had saved the marshal's life, and not only had he received no reward, but he even didn't want to talk about it. So how could we accept remuneration for merely bathing his face?

"I'd feel better if you boys accepted this," the Snake Feeder continued. "Money means nothing to me. It was a little late in arriving—that's all. Yes, and it would have made but slight difference, if any, to this old world, if you had allowed me to die."

He stopped then, and we still hung back. Instead of arguing, he thrust a dollar into the hot palm of each of us. Then he slumped down, and we thought he was going to faint again; but he didn't.

Instead, he began to converse with us, but not as a grown-up to boys. He didn't talk down to us, but talked as one boy to another, boy slang and all. He was a boy the same as we, a boy with the same thoughts and the same interests—the same hopes, I was about to add, but that would have been error, for the future did not enter into the Snake Feeder's conversation.

He discussed fishing, the habits and haunts of worms, and whether spitting on the hook brought luck. He held that it did — if the fish were there. He talked about the science of one old cat. He told us the best way to cure warts—I had three large ones, and was particularly interested, though the remedy he recommended was to be bought in drug stores, and not found in woods or graveyards. Acetic acid, I believe he called it.

He talked of the shortness of vacation and the length of the school term, and told us why the ponds turned green in the summer. It wasn't long before our hearts went out to him as one of our own kind, and soon we were revealing our curious boyish world, with all its indefinite, inchoate aims.

The Snake Feeder listened closely, occasionally spurring us on with a pertinent question, until an attenuated insect settled itself on a pile of driftwood held against the bank by an inshore eddy.

"What is that?" he asked, picking up the visitor with his thumb and forefinger, but doing it so gently that the delicate wings were uninjured.

"A snake feeder," ejaculated Squank, not without embarrassment.

Our Snake Feeder laughed long and loud. Then he released the insect and watched it speed away.

"I mustn't injure my namesake," he said, still laughing. "I've been wondering where this town got its label for me. I see it now. It's mighty apt!"

The member of the odonata family gone, the Snake Feeder resumed talking with us. So skillfully did he lead the conversation into the channels that he desired, that far more subtle persons than Dewey, Squank, and I would have been equally unsuspicious. Right willingly we pictured to him the leading people in Unionville.

"Who is your most prominent resident, the one everybody looks up to?" he asked at last.

The inquiry was casual, though I noted subconsciously that his knuckles — his hands were clasped over his knees—whitened as he spoke.

"The judge!" we exclaimed, without hesitation.

"Oh, yes — the judge. Tell me about him."

The honor—for as such I took it—fell to me. Rapidly I recited the well known facts. The judge lived in the white house at the top of the hill, the one with the iron fence around it. He was always elected by a large majority, and while people said he was hard, they also said he was just, because he treated alike all who came before him. He was an elder in the First Presbyterian Church. He sat in the second pew from the front, and on Sundays he put a dollar bill in the collection plate.

The Snake Feeder appeared to be so much interested that I prodded my mind for further details, but all I could remember was that he was the example of all that was right and good, according to everybody who knew him. Several boys whom we knew intended to study law and grow up to be commanding, outstanding figures like him.

"How long has he lived here?"

I hesitated for a moment, being about to reply "Always," and then remembering what my grandfather told my Uncle Henry.

"About fifteen years," I said.

"His name is Gilbert Browne?"

"How did you know that?"

The surprise I felt was in my voice.

"Never mind! I know a great many things. Who lives with him?"

"A colored woman," answered Dewey, grabbing the center of the stage from me. "She's the blackest wench in town, and skinny."

"He hasn't any use for women, my grandfather says," I interjected, and thus regained my rightful place. "He has never married."

"Where did he come from?"

The Snake Feeder had caught my arm in a grip that hurt, and I thought he was looking at me just as he looked at the judge that day on the square.

"Let go, please, Snake—"

"'Snake Feeder' is right," he said, releasing me; "and just about as harmless as the dragon flies that you boys call by the name!"

Without saying good-by, the Snake Feeder left us.

We decided that it was too late to go fishing. Those three dollars were burning holes in our pockets, so we went to Beaver's store and bought new rods. Penniless, but thoroughly happy, we walked toward our homes, talking about the Snake Feeder. The interest he had shown in the judge and his home mystified us.

With the judge on our minds, we kept on up the hill until we reached his house. After looking at it for a long time from the front, we went around to the back.

The alley gate was locked tight. How

we dared to do it, and why, we didn't know, but we climbed the back fence, which was a tangle of vines. When we got into the yard, we found the judge's housekeeper waiting for us, with fire in her eyes, and her thin lips a straight line.

"Ef you-all don't get out right now, Ah'll po' b'ilin' water on you!" she said.

She held a teakettle in her hand, and steam was issuing from the spout. She was a short, emaciated woman, but there was such menace in her words and attitude that we went back over the fence more hurriedly than we had entered.

Two days later our hands broke out with white, watery blisters. Those vines were poison ivy.

VI

An odd vehicle came along Front Street to the courthouse, where the driver stopped his horses. It was a covered wagon—not a prairie schooner, but a battered farm wagon, with a worn and dirty canvas top patched in several places, the bows sagging. A stovepipe protruding from the rear was a certain sign that it was a habitation as well as a conveyance.

As soon as we saw the man on the front seat, we named him the Red Man. He was big and heavy in build. The bridge of his nose was high, and his nostrils wide and hairy. The skin of his face was red, and sprouts of heavy red beard stubbled his cheeks, his upper lip, his chin, and his throat. The front of his blue flannel shirt was open, revealing a thick mat of red hair on his chest. His eyes were rimmed with red, and his big hands were red, even the freckles that dotted their woolly backs being more red than yellow.

A shriveled wisp of a woman, whose features were hidden by a tunnel-like sunbonnet, was on the seat with him. Her calico dress was faded in queer streaks and worn in places.

Tying the team to the rack, the Red Man—apparently unobserved by his companion—took an apple from his pocket and fed it to one of his horses. Then, without a word to the woman, he strode past Dewey, Squank, and me, and, crossing the street, shouldered his way insolently through the crowd of idlers and into one of the saloons.

The woman sat on the seat, unmoving, her head down.

"Marsh rats!" said Dewey. "Probably their onions were blown out of the ground, and they didn't have any money for more seed."

"And now they're living in that wagon. Gosh, I'd like to do that—just roam around the country!" added Squank.

"She doesn't look like a marsh rat," I objected.

"You're an expert, you are!" taunted Dewey. "If that dress isn't marsh, then I don't know!"

"It's her hands," I retorted, stung by Dewey's tone. "They're as clean as—" I hesitated for want of a simile. Then a scene down among the willows, many days before, came to me. "As clean as the Snake Feeder's," I concluded.

"I noticed that, too," said Squank. "They're long and thin, and, though they look like she's done hard work, they're white and clean. She hasn't been weeding onions."

Dewey agreed reluctantly. The hands of the onion weeders were always grimy, because the fine, black soil of the marsh worked into the skin.

That point settled, we went over to the Union National to do our banking. As usual, we passed by Charlie Mechant and interrupted Tom Spiers, who was working on his books.

"By rights you should go to Charlie," he said, getting down off his high stool and smiling at us. "He's the teller, and I'm only a bookkeeper."

"If it isn't bothering you too much, we'd rather do business with you," said Dewey, and we backed him up.

"No bother at all, boys," replied Tom. "If I can attract depositors, I'm a part of the assets of this bank. Glad to serve any time I can."

He didn't laugh when he said it, and his eyes were serious. Courteously he handed back the three books with the neat entries, and turned to his work.

"Hello, millionaires!" said Charlie Mechant, as we passed his window.

I wished he would get a job at the Farmers' Savings, so that I wouldn't see him any more; but when we were almost at the door, he beckoned to me, and I went back.

"Here's a dime and a note for Miss Miller," he whispered. "Bring me back an answer, and there's another dime in it for you."

With money coming in like that, I could afford to suppress my feelings; so I told Squank and Dewey I would meet them at the fishing tackle store, and they said they would wait.

I ran almost all the way to the Millers' house, but Nelly asked me to sit down while she read the message. As she read, her black eyes snapped and her face got red.

" No answer," she said. " If he thinks he can tell me who I can go with — but wait just a minute."

I sat down again. It was a lot longer than a minute, for she wrote one note and tore it up. Then she started two more before her pen began to scratch regularly. My, but she was pretty!

When she handed it to me at last, the envelope was sealed.

" Don't give it to any one else but him," she warned, the color still in her face, and I promised.

I delivered the note to Charlie, and stood there, waiting for my pay. He bit his lip while he was reading. When he finished, he tore the paper into fine pieces and threw them into the wastebasket.

" Well, what do you want?" he demanded crossly, when he looked up and saw me still there.

" My dime," I answered.

He only turned his back and fussed with a pile of bills.

" Get out!" he ordered at last.

I made up my mind that when I got my long trousers I'd get even with him, if I had to make dates with Nelly Miller myself. Then I thought of Mamie Merrill, and saw that that wouldn't do. There would be some other way.

Dewey and Squank were pretty mad at me, but when I told them how Charlie Mechant had acted they were sore at him. Having nothing else to do, we walked over toward the courthouse yard.

A knot of people, rapidly growing larger, was gathered about the place where the Red Man had tied his team. One of the horses was down, and, just as we got there, it died. Some one went into the saloon and told the Red Man. He came running over, swearing expertly.

" I didn't want to stop in this hellhole any longer than it took me to get a couple of drinks of liquor, but now, with this damned horse dead, I'm stuck in the rotten place for God only knows how long!" he roared, after he had apparently reached a climax in invective.

More highly colored oaths followed.

" Quit swearing," interrupted Gabriel White, stepping forward authoritatively. " If you can't buy another horse, and don't want to live in your wagon while you're earning money enough to go on, there's a house down on the river bank you can use."

The Red Man glared at the representative of the law as if White was the cause of his troubles; but after a moment or so he subsided.

" I'll shake the dust of this damned place off my feet just as soon as I can, Mr. Officer," he snarled. " Get me down to that house!"

The woman, still on the front seat in almost exactly the same position as she was when the Red Man left her, didn't say a word or raise her head.

Gabriel White borrowed a horse from the livery stable and showed the Red Man where the house was. It was a crazy shack, with flood records in ochre on the outside, and slime and filth on the inside. The Red Man seemed to be satisfied, however, and the woman, silent during disaster, was mute until the marshal left.

Then in a flash she turned on the Red Man.

" You murderer!" she exclaimed.

" Aw, what's the matter with you?" he growled.

" You killed the horse with that apple!"

" So you saw me, did you? What if I did kill the critter? It was my horse, wasn't it? Anyway, what have you got to kick about? You've got a house to live in, with plenty of running water "—he waved a red paw toward the river—" and I'm going to live easy. I'm safe here—safe as a bug in a rug. I'm—what are you brats doing here?"

His red-lighted eyes were on us.

We judged that it was time to go. It was so late that we had to run all the way home to avoid missing our suppers.

My folks were just sitting down. Before they could scold me, I began telling about the Red Man and his horse.

" Unionville is growing," remarked my grandfather, when I ran out of material. " First the Snake Feeder, and now the Red Man!"

" The Snake Feeder is more or less of a mystery," responded my father, filling my plate with meat and potatoes. " I heard to-day that he lives in one of the best rooms in the St. George Hotel, and always has plenty of money, though he hasn't done a stroke of work since he came here. He's the best dressed man in Unionville, too."

"He hasn't met the judge lately, has he?" asked my grandfather, cupping his ear with his hand to catch the reply, father being on his deaf side.

"The judge doesn't go on the South Side," answered my father. "The South Side doesn't care for him. There are too many missing from there because of him—boarding down at the penitentiary and in the workhouse!"

I was going to tell how the Snake Feeder had questioned us about the judge, but I thought better of it. I had escaped the scolding, and I didn't want to attract any more attention than was strictly necessary. Moreover, I looked on the Snake Feeder as my friend, while my folks evidently didn't regard him as a desirable associate.

As soon as I got through with my work, I sneaked over to Mamie Merrill's house. The moon was big and round, and we sat on the front porch, in the shadow of the clematis vines, which were full of purple flowers. I had washed carefully before leaving home, and after a while—it took me a long time, because I did not want her to know what I was doing—I found her hand and held it.

By and by we were sitting close together, and, still without letting her know what I was doing, I put my arm around her. It was the first time I ever had my arm around a girl, and I didn't know how pleasant and thrilling it could be. I kept her from realizing where I had my arm by telling her what I intended to do when I got through school.

She was the sweetest girl in the whole world! About her was a touch of perfume that reminded me of wild flowers. Whenever the night wind parted the vines enough for the moonbeams to shine through, I could see those pure agate glints dancing in her eyes.

Nelly Miller and Tom Spiers walked by. Tom wore a new brown suit and stood up straight. He was a fine-looking fellow, with one of those broad faces and square chins. His blue eyes, while they were jolly, and not at all stern, were steady and fine. Nelly was laughing and Tom looked happy. I guess the whole world was happy. I know I was.

I told Mamie about the note Charlie had sent Nelly, and how Charlie had beaten me out of a dime. I felt that with my arm around her I could tell her everything.

"Charlie Mechant, with all his good looks, doesn't know much about girls," she sniffed.

"Why?"

"Stupid! Don't you see, Charlie found out she had a date with Tom for to-night, and tried to get her to break it. She wouldn't do it, and that's what made him so cross."

That explanation had never occurred to me, but I knew Mamie was right.

We talked a little while longer, and I held her closer. Her face was upturned and her wonderful eyes were shining. Before I realized what I was doing, I had bent over and kissed her full on her sweet red lips!

She drew back, startled, and pushed me away with such force that I almost fell off the bench.

"Go!" she commanded, and I could feel a sting in her voice.

"Mamie—" I began awkwardly, my face a flame and my knees trembling.

"Don't talk to me," she said, "and don't come back any more."

The pure agate glints no longer danced in her eyes.

A wretched, condemned criminal, I slunk out of the yard and down the street. Nelly and Tom were sitting on her porch, and she was singing. I couldn't look at them, and the song made me want to cry—and it was all my own fault!

There wasn't anybody on our porch. My folks had gone to a party, and grandfather was in bed. It was one of those rare nights when I could stay out late without being sentenced to hard labor on the weeds; but I didn't care for liberty. My heart was too heavy. I just sat there on the porch and mourned.

The judge went by, Gabriel White walking with him. As they passed, I heard the marshal mention the name of Will Wilson.

Nobody else was on the street, and it was very still. I heard the clock strike ten, and then eleven, but I couldn't go to bed, because I was too miserable. I had lost Mamie Merrill, and nothing mattered.

I heard some one coming, and shrank back into the shadows. I didn't want anybody to see me, and I didn't want to see anybody; but the footfalls stopped a short distance from the house, and my curiosity was excited.

I looked down the street. Standing in front of the Episcopal Church was the Snake Feeder!

I forgot my troubles instantly. The judge was at home, and the Snake Feeder was on his way thither. Vaguely I sensed tragedy. My nerves were taut.

The Snake Feeder looked about him carefully. I thought he was making sure that he was not being followed. Then he darted into the vestry of the church, and I heard the door, which was never locked, being opened cautiously.

My footsteps muffled by the grass, I stole across the lawns to the church. In the rear of the building there was a window of plain glass, and I climbed up to this and peered inside.

For a long time I could see nothing except the altar and the pews, though the moonlight streamed through the stained glass windows, and I thought the Snake Feeder must have come out. Finally I saw him. He was kneeling before the altar, and his head was bowed. I got down and waited behind a near-by tree.

Fifteen minutes must have elapsed before I heard the door open and close, and the Snake Feeder stepped outside. He stood there, gazing at the three windows that made the front of the church resemble a mask, and I saw him as a different Snake Feeder. It was his face that had changed. The old expression, half sadness and half contempt for the world, was gone. In its place was a look of peace.

Instead of going toward the South Side, he took the street that led to the St. George Hotel.

VII

Will Wilson had been indicted by the grand jury as a professional gambler! The announcement in the *Daily News* shook the town. Every one knew that Wilson made his living by gambling. His place upstairs on the South Side was undisguised, but this was the first time the law had taken cognizance of his calling.

Despite the effect on Unionville, the indictment did not seem to affect Wilson. He stood at the stairway just as usual, and laughed and talked with those who stopped, though he did not invite them upstairs. He was freshly barbered, his suit was new, and in his buttonhole was a red geranium blossom with a leaf as a background, the stems done up in tinfoil.

Mayor Valley left the courthouse and leaned against the iron fence, idly looking up and down the street. Wilson saw him and came over.

" I guess you had better close up for a little while, Will," said the mayor to the gambler.

" All right, Frank! I'll lay low until this thing blows over. Of course Gabe White took that boob Sawyer before the grand jury, and backed up his testimony, but I wonder who got the fool to squeal?"

" Tom Spiers."

" Tom Spiers?" echoed Wilson, an ugly look coming into his cat eyes, and his smooth, white forehead wrinkling in a scowl. " How in hell did he know anything about it? He's never been in my place."

Dewey, Squank, and I were sitting in the grass behind the fence, attracting no attention to ourselves.

" Well, Will, you've been trimming Ned Sawyer pretty regularly. Tom Spiers is nobody's damn fool. He saw Sawyer's account getting lower and lower, and then he found out about a mortgage Ned had put on his house. Tom asked him about it, and Ned told him. He knows Ned's wife and three kids, so he went to White, and with the assistance of that strait-laced officer he got Sawyer to go before the grand jury. By the way, Will, this is in confidence, of course. You know where it came from."

Wilson nodded.

" And because of Tom Spiers I've got to close the works for a while! Damn fine piece of business for Tom Spiers! I've never meddled in his affairs, but guess I'll have to take a hand now. Maybe I'll have to change my banking place."

Wilson strode over to the Union National in great indignation; but he didn't go to Tom Spiers's high desk. He went right into the office of Aaron Burns, the white-headed president, a citizen second only in importance to the judge.

In a few minutes Tom Spiers was summoned to the president's office.

" Guess I'm called up on the carpet," he said to Charlie Mechant, as he passed the teller's window.

Tom had seen Wilson enter. Charlie looked white, and his hands trembled as he arranged a lot of loose bills. He didn't reply.

Dewey, Squank, and I, who had followed unobtrusively, could hear a steady murmur of voices behind the glass that inclosed the office of Mr. Burns, but we could not tell what was being said.

"Hope Charlie Mechant is called in, too," whispered Squank.

He wasn't, however, and by and by Tom came out. His face was flushed, and there were beads of perspiration on his forehead, but he didn't seem to be downhearted.

Tom was busily working on his books when Wilson, cool, suave, smiling, opened the door. As he did so, Mr. Burns pressed a black cigar with a gold band into the gambler's hand.

"I can assure you there will be no more such happenings," said the bank president. "Spiers meant all right, but he's young, and lacks balance in such matters. After all, he's only a bookkeeper."

"Oh, we'll let bygones be bygones this time," replied Will Wilson, smiling at Charlie Mechant.

Charlie didn't return the smile. The president was looking at him. He merely nodded and stood at the window, as if he was expecting Wilson to make a deposit, though the day was not Monday.

As soon as Wilson went out through the big front door, Mr. Burns, paying no attention to us, hurried back to Tom, his face black.

"I should have fired you in Wilson's presence," he said coldly. "It is the business of this bank's employees to bring in depositors, instead of chasing them away."

"But you didn't lose Wilson's account, sir."

"It was through no fault of yours that we didn't. Why didn't you apologize to him?"

"Because I believe I did right. Also because I know too much about Wilson's business. In addition, I know the business of the patrons of his establishment—a great many of them."

Charlie Mechant, who, though he had his back turned, could hear as plainly as we, looked as if he was going to be ill.

"That's what you told him, and you needn't repeat it. Business is business. Our business is to get as much money into our vaults as possible. We owe that to our stockholders. It's a good thing for you, Tom Spiers, that Will Wilson is generous enough to allow his account to remain in the Union National. There isn't a business man around the square with a balance as large as Wilson's."

"Perhaps Will Wilson is the reason why!"

Mr. Burns turned purple, and his well trimmed white goatee quivered. When he did speak, he fairly choked out his words.

"You've a mighty good record here, outside of this one thing, Tom Spiers, but you're driving me to throw you out."

"If I'm to be thrown out for telling the truth, Mr. Burns, go ahead!"

Tom got off his stool and walked to the hook where his street coat and hat were hanging.

Burns glared at him for a moment. Tom was just as cool and steady as if he was leaving for his noonday meal instead of giving up a good job. Mr. Burns still hesitated while Tom was putting on his coat; but as he reached for his hat, the president spoke.

"Don't let it happen again," he snapped, and returned to his private office.

We wanted to congratulate Tom, who removed his coat and went back to work, but we decided that it would be best to efface ourselves.

Father had to go to the Masonic lodge, so we had an early supper. I watered the lawn three times, having nothing else to do. Then I got a dull knife and pried out some weeds. Grandfather looked at me queerly.

"Sick or something?" he asked.

"No," I lied.

It was a lie. I was sick—sick for Mamie Merrill. I hadn't seen her for more than two weeks. I never realized how much difference a girl made, but I did then. Two weeks! It seemed like two years; yet when I shut my eyes, I could see her brown hair and her eyes with the glints of the pure agate.

Just as soon as it was dark enough, I sneaked through the alley over to Main Street and started for her house. I couldn't stand it any longer. I was afraid to meet her, but it was my last hope.

Nelly Miller was sitting on her porch, alone. She saw me and called to me cheerfully, and I answered her. There was a mischievous look on her face, but she didn't say anything about Mamie Merrill.

Mamie was not on her porch. I walked to the end of the street and then back again, but she hadn't come out. Then I walked down almost as far as Nelly Miller's, and returned. This time I whistled the call that Mamie knew. I walked very slowly, and looked back almost constantly, but though the front door was open—a certain indication that she was at home—she didn't come out.

I didn't want to see Dewey, and I didn't want to see Squank. I only wanted to see one person in the world, and she wouldn't see me; so I turned around and walked down town.

Charlie Mechant drove up to Nelly Miller's in one of Burchard's best rigs—a new stanhope with rubber tires and a chestnut horse that pranced and stepped high. I guess it was an unlucky day for both Tom Spiers and myself!

It was a beautiful late summer evening, and many people were on the streets. I knew all of them, but I was lonely—more lonely than I had ever been before. The katydids were singing. In six weeks there would be frost, and summer and vacation would be over; but instead of shrilling "Katy did, Katy didn't," every one of them was calling:

"Mamie Merrill, Mamie Merrill!"

The courthouse yard was dark, and I sat on a bench for a while. I couldn't think of anything else but Mamie Merrill, so I started to walk again.

The South Side was all lighted up, with the exception of Will Wilson's place, and there was a big crowd. I looked for the Snake Feeder among those in front of the Good Luck, but he wasn't there. Then I remembered that since the night I saw him kneeling in the Episcopal church, he hadn't been on the South Side.

At the corner I met him. He was taking a drink from one of the iron fountains, and when he finished he wiped his mouth on a white handkerchief. He spoke, and I stopped.

"Hello, friend!" he said. "Taking a stroll?"

I didn't know whether I was or not, but I nodded assent.

"Do you mind if I walk with you? I'm a little lonely to-night."

I wanted to tell him that he didn't know what loneliness meant, but I was silent as he fell into step with me.

We walked around the square as far as Turney's drug store, and he asked me to have a soda. I took a vanilla milk shake, and felt an improvement.

In the store I could see that the Snake Feeder looked much better than he did the last time I saw him. His clothes were new, and his face seemed fuller. There was a spot of crimson in each cheek, but his lips were as bloodless as ever.

Out in the air I was silent again, because those katydids kept up their everlasting "Mamie Merrill, Mamie Merrill!" I wished there wasn't a katydid in the whole world.

"What's the matter, boy?" the Snake Feeder said kindly.

"Nothing. Why?"

"You haven't said a word in the last ten minutes. Are you angry with me?"

"No."

"What's troubling you, then?"

The Snake Feeder placed an arm—all bone, except for a knot of muscle—on my shoulder.

"Come on—sit down here and tell me all about it. You can trust the old Snake Feeder!"

We sat down on a bench. Across the street, in one of the saloons, a piano was playing—some one had put a nickel in it—and a man with a husky tenor voice was singing a sad song. There was the sound of a scuffle, and a man was thrown out of the Good Luck. He struck in the gutter. When he got up and staggered on his way without a word, he was covered with filth.

I told the Snake Feeder all about Mamie Merrill. Something made me. Of course, I didn't mention Mamie's name, but I told him why I had lost her. He didn't interrupt me, but kept his arm on my shoulder, and that was comforting. Then I realized that I was telling him something I would have revealed to no one else.

"It's hard, all right—I know," he said; "but what do you intend to do when you finish school?"

I couldn't answer directly, because Mamie Merrill had been so deeply involved in my plans for the future, and now there was no Mamie Merrill in my life; so I didn't say anything.

"Did you ever think about studying law?"

"No—civil engineering."

"The law offers many opportunities for bright young men."

"Are you a lawyer?"

"I know a great deal about the law."

Then he told me about the profession—how a man might make a name for himself, and at the same time might serve those who called on him. He interested me, and turned my thoughts into a new channel.

"And I might get to be like the judge!" I exclaimed.

"The judge!" he repeated, that knot of muscle tensing. "Don't you people think of any one but the judge? I hear about him always."

"And you know him?"

The Snake Feeder looked away.

"Yes, I know him — know him better than anybody else in Unionville."

"How can you, when you've been here such a short time?"

"That's a matter I don't care to discuss to-night. Certain things I intended to do have been delayed through no fault of my own. Let's talk about something pleasant. I've tried to keep out of Judge Browne's way, but he's always being thrust under my nose. Sometimes I think I'll—"

"Why do you stay here, then?"

"I can't answer that question. Perhaps I may tell you some day, but not now. By the way, what do people here in Unionville say about me besides calling me the Snake Feeder?"

Again an impulse toward candor came over me, and I told him that people regarded him as a mystery.

"Why?"

"Because you haven't done a tap of work since you've been here, yet you always have money, you live at the St. George, and you're the best dressed man in Unionville."

The Snake Feeder laughed.

"Perhaps they think I'm a burglar!"

"No, I don't believe so; but nobody knows your real name."

"Snake Feeder will do as well as any. It's descriptive, anyway. I even registered that way at the St. George. This is in confidence, young man—strict confidence. Nobody need worry about my means of existence. Years ago I received money enough to keep me the rest of my life, no matter how long I may live. Since then I've been on a long journey. The end of it seems to be Unionville. I'm content to be the Snake Feeder here. I don't know how long a time I have yet, but, as I view things now, I'll spend the rest of my allotment here. By the way, do you know what's the matter with me?"

"Whisky," I replied promptly, though I didn't smell any on his breath.

"Yes — whisky and something else. Whisky is bad, but the other is fatal. Whisky makes me forget, at times, but just at present I'm trying to forget whisky. I hope you'll never meddle with it!"

I never intended to, and I told him so. One reason was Mamie Merrill.

"Don't take that girl matter too hard, either. It's better to have it come to you early in life than later. It's painful — I know that—and you have my sympathy. Still, you're young, and that means that there is a possibility of a cure. I'm sure she's a nice girl, beautiful, and with wonderful eyes?"

"Yes!"

Now that she was gone, she seemed even more beautiful than she did that night on the porch.

"Buck up! Don't let your mind dwell on your troubles. Go fishing with your two friends."

Somehow I liked the Snake Feeder better and better every minute.

A sensation that it must be late came over me, and I asked the Snake Feeder what time it was. He looked at his gold watch. I had five minutes to get home and into bed!

I said good night hurriedly, and ran up the alleys. I could have saved time by taking the street, but I was getting too big for that. Somehow I felt older and more responsible. I guess my experience with Mamie Merrill had aged me.

VIII

A COUPLE of weeks later—and in all that time I wasn't able to see Mamie Merrill—Dewey, Squank, and I planned to go fishing very early in the morning. The Old Sycamore wasn't as good a place as it had been, and we decided that it was because we got there too late in the day. Near the end of summer fish always bite the best just after daylight; so we agreed to start at four o'clock. Dewey promised to awaken me, and we two would get Squank.

I went to bed early, and it was just as well that I did, because Dewey was so afraid of oversleeping that he came for me at half past three. It wasn't even light yet, and he had a hard time getting me awake; but finally he pitched a rock through the window.

Squank was just coming out of the kitchen when we got to his house. The bait was already dug, and we weren't delayed. We had enough food for breakfast and lunch, and we intended to eat as soon as we started fishing.

The urge of the stream on us, we trotted the entire three miles. Early as we were, however, we were not the first ones there. Our ears told us that as we approached. So that was why the Old Sycamore was failing in its yield of fish!

We were angry, but we didn't come up with a rush. The voices we heard were those of adults, so we sneaked up cautiously. It was well that we did so, for they weren't fishermen.

Seated in a circle, with a lantern casting sickly gleams, though it was broad daylight now, were Will Wilson and half a dozen others. Among them was Charlie Mechant. He was not the trim, slightly supercilious, carefully groomed teller that we saw in the Union National Bank. His clothing was mussed, and so was his black hair. His troubled eyes had dark smudges beneath them, and his face was haggard. His hands were unsteady, and he had trouble in picking up the cards that Wilson dealt to him.

Will Wilson was seated cross-legged, and in the hollow made by his limbs was a heap of bills weighted down by neat piles of silver. Some of the other men had money in front of them, or stuck in the tops of their shoes.

Doc Jimminson, the veterinarian, had a two-dollar bill behind his ear. We knew why. Two-dollar bills were held to be unlucky, and the recipient of one, to avoid the curse, had to tear off the lower left-hand corner, throw it away, and rub the remainder behind his left ear.

In front of Charlie Mechant there was nothing.

So intent were the men on the game that they did not notice our arrival. We three stood there, forgetful of why we had come, and equally forgetful of concealment, our fish poles in our hands.

As the deal began, each man tossed money into the center of the circle. Charlie Mechant searched through his pockets with his shaky hands, drew out a few crumpled bills, and threw them with the rest.

When the players had received their cards, they fanned them out carefully. Then Doc Jimminson took a ten-dollar bill from his shoe, and threw it in.

"I'll open her for ten," he announced.

Four of the other men folded up their cards and laid them on the grass. It was then Charlie Mechant's turn.

"Let me have another hundred, Will," he asked, licking his dry lips.

"Give me an I. O. U., and I'll make out a note later," replied the gambler, folding his cards together before picking up the money.

Even with the hundred taken out of his pile, there seemed to be plenty left.

"I'll raise you ten, doc," said Charlie, putting in twenty dollars.

"And I'll make it an even fifty to draw cards," added Wilson, dropping five ten-dollar bills.

Doc Jimminson studied his hand. Then he placed forty dollars in the middle. Charlie put in thirty.

"Cards?" asked Wilson.

Doc and Charlie each took two. Wilson, after looking at his hand for a long time, also took two.

"I think I'll hold a kicker myself," he said, as he flipped out the cards.

"I'll begin her easy," said the doctor, who had squinted at the corners of his cards. "I want to see what the cat drug in for you fellows. Ten dollars!"

"Fifty," remarked Charlie, his voice steady.

"Trail," said Wilson.

"Call," said Doc Jimminson, adding forty dollars to his bet.

Then they laid down their hands.

Doc had three kings. Wilson laid down three little treys, and Charlie started to claw in the money as he showed three aces.

"Just a minute, Mechant!" interrupted Wilson. "Five cards make a hand. Here are my kickers!"

He put two sevens beside the three treys, making a full house.

Charlie's face was green. He started to say something, but couldn't. He looked as if he had been hit in the stomach.

"I'm clean," said Doc Jimminson, rising and lighting a long, thin cigar — a stogy, the kind he always smoked. "And I'll catch the very devil for being out all night!"

Charlie Mechant got up also, his clothes wrinkled and grass-stained, and an old, drawn look on his face.

"What's your hurry, Mechant?" asked Will Wilson. "We haven't fixed that note out yet."

Charlie took a form from his pocket. Wilson filled it out with a fountain pen trimmed with gold, and handed it to Charlie.

Charlie looked at the paper, horror in his eyes.

"I didn't lose that much money to-night!" he exclaimed. "A hundred was all I got to-night!"

"Right, but I'm tired of holding your I. O. U.'s for the rest of it. Can't collect on I. O. U.'s. A note means something. I have to look after every dollar, now that your friend Tom Spiers has closed me up. You've got three months to raise the cash, young man. If you don't, I'll turn that note into your own bank for collection. I had that string in mind when I didn't take my account away because of that meddling Spiers—damn him! You know what old Billy Goat Burns would do if he thought one of his employees was gambling! Sign right here."

For a moment we thought Charlie would be man enough to resist. He kept looking at Wilson, who held the pen and paper toward him, and at last he took it and signed his name.

"Let me have ten more, Will," he pleaded, handing back the note.

"What do you want it for—to take Nelly Miller out buggy riding?"

Charlie Mechant turned red and merely grinned.

"The river road's a fine drive this time of year," continued Wilson, a leer on his face. "Lots of shady places, and few travelers; and a pretty girl like her—"

"My board is due to-day, Will," interrupted Mechant weakly.

"You're a lucky dog! She *is* a pretty girl," continued Wilson, stowing the note in a big yellow wallet which he took from an inside pocket. "Your board will have to wait, Charlie. This bank is closed for the day."

He leafed the bills, which he had picked up from the grass, into a neat sheaf, placed them in the wallet, and then put that receptacle away, buttoning his coat over it.

Charlie turned dejectedly. Wilson's tone was final.

After he had gone, the gambler reached for the lantern, and saw us. Our interest in what was happening had made us forget caution utterly. We were standing right out in the open, though places of concealment, within easy seeing distance and earshot, were abundant.

Without changing his expression, and with his steady black eyes holding us, he took from his hip pocket a great, gleaming revolver, which held enormous cartridges.

"Come here!" he commanded.

Despite the orders our brains were issuing to our legs to run in another direction, his will pulled us nearer to him.

"See this gun?" he demanded, pointing the weapon at us, his forefinger on the trigger. "I'll blow your brains out if you say anything about me—even a peep. Are you kids going to tell Gabriel White?"

The answer was obvious. Terrified not alone by the size and potentialities of that revolver, but also by the ferocious look of the man who held it, we gave our most sacred words, our hearts trembling against our ribs.

Will Wilson put the revolver back, blew out the lantern, and followed the others.

We could still feel ourselves bored by his eyes, long after he was out of sight. We baited our hooks mechanically, spat on them, and cast them into the water; but we couldn't concentrate on fishing. When we should have been intent on our bobbers, our attention was distracted by a feeling that some one was peering at us from the bushes.

"Let's give it up," said Squank, while it was still early in the forenoon.

With relief we retrieved our lines and started back to town. We didn't hurry on our return trip. We loitered along the way, and followed the river bank instead of taking the road. We didn't want to meet Will Wilson and his party.

We passed the old house where the marshal had taken the Red Man. He was there still, because the woman was out in front, chopping kindling. She didn't look up at us, though she must have heard us. The muddy flood records were still on the house, but the place was cleaner, and there were curtains at the windows.

As we went by the Union National, we saw Charlie Mechant in his cage, as usual. He looked a little pale, and had on a different suit; but we felt easier.

Tom Spiers was standing in the big plate glass window, and he waved at us and smiled. I felt sorry for him. The fact that Charlie Mechant hadn't resented Will Wilson's words about Nelly Miller gave them an evil meaning.

Gabriel White drove by, and a flush of guilt went over me as he flourished his buggy whip at us, not in a menacing manner—we were fully cognizant of the code of the whip—but in a friendly way. Afterward we admitted that our consciences pricked us, for Will Wilson was plainly outwitting Gabriel by playing poker up the river, instead of in his gambling room.

But we thought of that pistol and that look!

"He'd kill us sure, if we told," said Dewey.

"I'd like to, but I don't dare," said Squank.

"So would I," I agreed; "but I don't want to die."

"He shot Em Richards," added Dewey, "and got out after five years, because he had a pull. We'd better keep our mouths shut."

We did.

It wasn't long, however, before Will Wilson was back on the South Side. Before frost crimsoned the trees and school started, we saw him at his old place beside the stairway, standing there like a black spider in front of his web, nodding and whispering to men who went upstairs.

His case had come up, and he had pleaded guilty. The judge fined him a thousand dollars, with the alternative of six months in the workhouse, and he paid. Mayor Valley, over the protests of Gabriel White, gave him a chance to make it back.

We thought it would not take Will Wilson very long. We had seen him deposit those thick rolls of bills in the Union National Bank.

(*To be continued in the May number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

LET'S GO AWAY!

Let's go away, dear—
  Just us two—
Out of the gray, dear,
  Into the blue;
From crowded places
  That fetter wings
To open spaces
  And glad green things.

We will be vagrants,
  You and I,
Out 'neath the fragrance
  Of God's pure sky;
Sharing the pleasure
  That nature yields
In heaped up treasure
  Of woods and fields.

Hither and thither—
  You with me—
Caring not whither
  Our path may be;
With winds that favor
  And kindly sun,
And all life's savor
  To hearten one!

Let's go away, dear—
  Just us two—
Out of the gray, dear,
  Into the blue;
From crowded places
  That fetter wings
To open spaces
  And glad green things!

Malcolm Douglas

The Discovery

A CURIOUS DIFFERENCE OF OPINION IN REGARD TO THE DRAMATIC ABILITY OF A YOUNG ACTRESS

By Leighton Osmun

IT was Albert Harley's business to select casts for the plays produced by Pohlman, Inc., and to stage-manage them during the early days of rehearsal—before Sam Pohlman or his brother Herman took charge. This evening, as he paused in the stage doorway to light his pipe, he reflected gloomily that he had had the devil of a day.

In spite of twenty years with the Pohlmans, from usher at their first theater to his present position, and in spite of his efforts to adopt a hard-boiled attitude—his own expression—toward his work, Harley still possessed the same sensitive, soft-hearted, eager nature that he had had when, as a boy, he had been irresistibly drawn to the world of the theater.

All he had heard the day long was:

" But my good Lord, Bert—casting three plays, and not a part for me!"

" Three plays!" he thought bitterly. " Yes, if this were in the old days, when we had eighteen or twenty people in a cast—didn't think we had a show, otherwise—good, full-bodied plays then! Look at them now—ten people, six people—once only three!"

He shook his head moodily. A casting director's life was not a happy one.

Harley was absolutely conscientious in his casting. No matter how it tore his heart to refuse an applicant, he did refuse if he thought the actor inadequate to the rôle. There was a part in one of these three plays which he had not been able to fill. He had stood out against friend after friend, appeal after appeal. He was weary to his soul.

He stepped out into the August heat of the alley, and plodded toward the street. Then, just when his mind was at low ebb, and it seemed as if in all the world there was nothing worth while, he made his discovery.

Harley had an ambition which rivaled even his desire to become a producer himself, so that no heavy-handed Pohlman could ruin the painstaking deftness of his work—and that was to discover a genius, an unknown, who would prove to be a great star, a star who would be to this country and the world of art what Bernhardt was to France and the world of art.

Some sixth sense told him that here was a real actress before she had said ten words, as she stepped out from the shadows of the alley to intercept him and to hand him a letter. He moved over to where an arc light sent its rays into the gloom, and read:

DEAR BERT:

Give Miss Haddon a chance. I believe she has ability. Regards,
TOD.

Tod Browling—let's see—why, Tod was out on the Pacific Coast now, with " Snowbound " No. 2 company.

" Experience?" Harley remembered himself just in time, and put on a forbidding frown.

" Two months in stock in Oakland." Lord, what a voice! " A little while at the Alcazar, in San Francisco." Rich and deep, with a peculiar vibrant quality. " Three seasons with the Majestic, in Los Angeles." Magnetism—by George, fairly oozing it! " Oh, Mr. Harley, if you would only give me even a walk-on part, so that I could say I'd had experience on Broadway!" Personality—great Shakespeare, reeking with it! " You don't know how I—"

Harley interrupted her sternly.

" What did you play in stock—leads?"

" Leads—character parts—everything. If you would only—"

" Come with me," he said abruptly.

Leading the way back to the dark and deserted stage, he turned on a single bulb on a high standard, and handed her a side.

"Look over a few pages—the part of *Violet*. Then read me the lines. *Violet*," he explained, "is the daughter of a wealthy and ultrasophisticated family. The piece is a divorce drama—a thing called 'Irons.' I'll cue you."

"I understand," she said.

He paced up and down, excited. Twenty years of contact with the stage had not destroyed his excitement over a first reading. Lord, what possibilities, what infinite possibilities, lay beyond it!

He could look at her now—he hadn't dared to in the alley, fearing that she might read the expression in his eyes, despite his frown. By George, she had looks, too! And those hands, those long, artistic fingers—the whole bag of tricks!

"I'm ready," she said at last.

"Let's see, that's the scene with the butler." He picked up another side from a pile on the table. "I'll take his lines. All set—begin!"

The dialogue was commonplace enough:

> VIOLET—"Well, William!"
>
> WILLIAM—"Yes, Miss Violet?"
>
> VIOLET—"Is mother home? Have you seen her?"
>
> WILLIAM—"I haven't, Miss Violet."
>
> VIOLET *(Crossing L.)*—"William, I'm worried. There's no one else I can talk to but you. I—William, I don't know what to think. I—"

"That's enough," said Harley at this point.

"Oh, but won't you let me—"

"You may report here for rehearsal at ten o'clock to-morrow."

"You mean I—"

Thank Heaven he could smile now! He did—a smile which lighted up his face, and drew into being hundreds of tiny lines around his eyes.

"I like your reading. I'm glad to give you a chance at the part. Of course, I can only try you out—can't promise it will be permanent, but I think you can do it. Take that side home with you. Go over it, but don't try to memorize yet. Just absorb the lines. Here's the script of the whole play—take that, and get the general idea. Please be here promptly at ten o'clock to-morrow."

"I can't begin to thank you," she began with a little gasp. "I—"

He interrupted with a wave of his hand which she evidently interpreted as dismissal. She said good night, turned, and made her way out.

Harley watched her go, slender, graceful, young. Then he put off the light, and walked over to the Lambs, where he lived.

II

THE first rehearsal of "Irons" was purely informal. There were seven in the cast—a husband, the star; his wife, the lead; their daughter; the butler; a maid; the wife's mother, and the other man. No sets were built yet. The cast sat around in a semicircle on nondescript chairs, and read their lines, each as his or her cues indicated.

The author, Richard Lathrop, stopped a reader from time to time to point out the precise value of a line. When he did this, he always prefaced his remarks by a deprecatory cough—it was his first play—removed his glasses, and sat leaning slightly forward. Sometimes an actor asked a question of him, but more often of the star, Henry Merritt, or of Harley. Harley himself put a question to the author now and then, but for the most part just listened and watched anxiously.

They were his flock. Except for the star, he had engaged them all. When one of them read a line with more than usual felicity, he glanced at Merritt, to see if he had noticed; but Merritt, tall, a trifle gray about the temples, dignified, was immersed in his own part, waiting merely for his cues.

So, as a matter of fact, were they all. The author smiled at some of the laugh lines and glanced around the circle, but no one else did.

Yes, they were Harley's flock, and he was loyal to them all, but he could not keep his eyes from straying to Miss Haddon. She bent over her side with a frown of concentration on her delicately cut features. Her brown hair, escaping from under her toque, played over her forehead and temples.

"By Shakespeare!" he said to himself. "She'll knock 'em cold!"

He wondered how the rest could keep their eyes from her.

At lunch time, Thrums, who played the butler—an actor of the old school, who had succeeded in adapting himself to the new sufficiently to play minor parts—strolled over to the director.

"Old son, really now—how about a little advance? Think the Pohlmans would stand for it? Wouldn't break the firm, would it?"

"I might arrange it," Harley admitted. "Come over here, Fred," he added.

He simply had to talk to some one. They

went up stage and perched on a *papier-mâché* railing.

"What's on your mind, old son?"

"Fred, how does Miss Hadden strike you?"

"Seems like a nice girl. Why?"

"I mean her reading—her voice, and all that."

"Well, I'm not one who pretends to be able to judge from a first reading, old son—never did; but I didn't see anything particularly the matter with it. I didn't, really."

"I mean," Harley returned impatiently, "hasn't she got a marvelous voice, a wonderful delivery, and personality—magnetism, and all that?"

"Oh!" The old actor looked at Harley curiously. Then, with just the suspicion of a twinkle in eyes, he hastened along the blazed trail. "Old son," he ended, "I think you've got a find!"

As the days went by, it gradually spread through the company that Harley had a find in Miss Haddon. Thrums retailed to him what they all said. Harley developed the habit of inviting the old-timer to dinner every night. He had to talk to some one, and he didn't want to talk to any one else yet.

"She has the same quality," Thrums told him, "that Clara Morris had at her age. Old son, she'll knock 'em for a goal!"

She was always grateful for suggestions, always eager to learn, a hard worker. The second day of rehearsals Harley took her out to lunch. He wanted to run over the scene that they were to do that afternoon, so that she would have a firm grip on it from the beginning. She insisted on paying for her own luncheon, but when she opened her purse, there were only a few stray dimes and nickels in it. She was embarrassed and vexed, but Harley made light of it by telling her that she was a real actress now, and actresses never had any money.

After this he took her daily, and saw that she ate good, nourishing food. She was a little under weight, he thought.

So far he had rehearsed the company entirely alone. Sam Pohlman was in Europe, and Herman was at home, nursing a cold. Harley nearly always had the breaking in of a play—the mechanical part, the movement of the characters, the creation of business, and all that. He always endeavored, during this time, to get the company far enough along, well enough grounded in the finer points, so that when the dreaded day of the Pohlman advent did come, all his work could not be undone.

Sometimes, but very rarely, his selection of some member of the cast would be disapproved—generally by Sam. He was glad that Sam was in Europe, and he would have only Herman, the more tractable of the two, to deal with; yet if Herman were still suffering with a cold when he put in his appearance, he might prove unruly. You never could tell. The question was, what would he say about Miss Haddon, an unknown, with no Broadway record?

Harley lived in a whirlwind of anxiety and anticipation, but the rehearsals progressed smoothly.

"Ada," he said to Miss Threnody, the white-haired woman who played the mother, "would you mind taking that cross again?"

"Look here, Harley, old chap!" It was the star speaking. "I don't like that cross. Far from me to be egotistical, but it screens me just as I am reading my line. That's an important line, d'ye see? Plants the fact that I have a doubt of myself—you understand that!"

"Couldn't I cross farther up stage, Bert, and start a little earlier, so as to get beyond Henry—you see?"

Harley turned to Merritt.

"Wouldn't that be all right, Henry? You see, I've got to get Ada over before Miss Haddon makes her entrance. That's her first entrance."

"Well, even that hardly covers the point, old chap. You see, on an important line like that, I should have the stage. Everybody else should be—er—static. I don't in the least wish, however"—he smiled his wintry smile—"to interfere with Miss Haddon's entrance."

"If I might offer a suggestion," the author said, "why couldn't Miss Threnody cross down to this corner—down stage?"

"Lathrop," the star observed mildly, "you're a rattling good author, but a rotten stage manager. You're fired!"

They both laughed.

"Do I have to enter just then, Mr. Harley?" Miss Haddon asked nervously. "Couldn't I wait until—"

"No," said Harley firmly. "Your entrance stands — with your permission, Henry."

"Oh, surely, surely!" The star smiled his wintry smile again. "My quarrel is with my old friend Ada. Her cross hits me in the eye and ruffles my sensibilities. Come on, now, Ada—let's do battle over this thing!"

It was all very friendly—a wonderful cast to handle. Harley beamed with pride—good play, too. He told the author so.

"Nice little piece, Mr. Lathrop! Ought to do well."

"Thank you," said Lathrop.

But Harley couldn't quite understand why there was not more comment about Miss Haddon. Thrums told him a good deal, but it was all secondhand. Why did nobody else speak to him about her?

Professional jealousy didn't mean much to Harley. He had seen cases of it, of course—rank cases—but not often. And in this company—no, it wasn't that. He puzzled over it a good deal.

One day he overtook Miss Threnody as she was walking out to Broadway.

"Look here, Ada, what's your opinion of Miss Haddon?"

"A very nice girl, Bert. You must teach her to use her hands, though. It isn't awkwardness, but they're sometimes at variance with the emotion she's supposed to be portraying."

"But her hands are wonderful, Ada!" he burst out. "Great Shakespeare, I can't keep my eyes off them!"

She smiled, gave his shoulder a little reassuring pat, and turned north. They had reached the corner of Broadway, and he was going south.

"I wouldn't have thought it of Ada!" he said to himself moodily.

Thrums, waiting for him in front of the Lambs, cheered him immensely.

"In that big scene in the third act, old son, she has the quality of Duse!"

At luncheon, the next day, she was very quiet. Harley wondered whether she was feeling the lack of the congratulations that she so richly deserved.

At last she said:

"Mr. Harley, tell me honestly, how am I doing?"

"Splendidly, Miss Haddon, splendidly! Lots to learn yet—of course you know that, but—well, splendidly!"

She looked at him doubtfully, then asked:

"Well enough, do you think, for Mr. Pohlman to let me stay on?"

"Certainly," he answered crisply. A wild desire to boast came over him. "When I O. K. any one, that settles it!"

It was on this day that he was led to tell her of his past life—of his struggles upward from being an usher, of his trials, of the time when he left the Pohlmans and they asked him to come back. She listened sympathetically, encouraging him with questions.

Then they talked about the producing game. Some of her remarks about that were pretty shrewd. By Shakespeare, the girl had a head on her!

All the time he was talking, one side of his mind was trying to analyze his emotions. They couldn't be analyzed except by going back away into the past—the first time he had talked to a star. Then, and then only, had he felt as he felt to-day—the terrific upswelling of admiration, almost awe. Harley felt now as he had then—that he was in the presence of some one more than human, of finer clay, different.

"Yes, that's it," he told himself. "She's different!"

III

THE dreaded day of the Pohlman invasion had arrived.

"Go ahead!" said Herman, as he lowered his bulky body into the back seat center aisle left.

The play began. When anything pleased the great man, he signified his pleasure by a fat grunt. When he was displeased, he roared out in a deep voice on a descending scale:

"No—no—no—no!"

Once he broke into the middle of a scene with—

"Try that again, Miss Threnody. Miss Threnody, an old actress like you should know better than to speak so light. Emphasize it. Get your lines over. Make the people in the balcony know that you mean them."

"But, Mr. Pohlman"—Miss Threnody advanced to the front of the stage—"that is a tentative line. It's not meant to be emphatic."

"You see, Mr. Pohlman," Lathrop seconded her, "the psychology of this scene—"

"What do I care if it has psychology and tentative if I can't hear it?" demanded Pohlman. "Let me hear it, and then I can tell!"

Miss Threnody read the lines over as Herman wished. Harley groaned.

Herman, however, didn't interrupt once during Miss Haddon's scenes. He merely looked at her without expression from under his heavy brows. Harley couldn't tell what the magnate thought, and—a coward for once in his life—he didn't dare to ask.

Seven hours saw the rehearsal through.

"Come with me," Herman said, and led the way to the elevator in the lobby.

He did not speak again until he was seated in his office, with Harley standing at the other side of the desk.

"Now what about this here Miss Haddon? How did you happen to cast her?"

"She brought a letter from Tod Browling."

"What good's that?"

"No good, but I tried her out in the part, and—what's the matter with her?"

"Nothing, only she can't act."

"Can't act?" Harley was stricken speechless.

"Hasn't a chance, Bert! Nice liddle girl," Pohlman rumbled on, "nice to look at, but can't act."

"Oh, come now, Herman, you're off—away off!"

"Why should I be off? I watched her, didn't I?"

"Well, so have I, for that matter."

"Fire her," Herman said heavily. "Get Miss Yates—she can do it. This one ain't got the style."

Harley's temper was rising.

"Why, she's a ringer for the part!"

"All right, then—you say she's all right, I say she ain't. Fire her!"

"I absolutely refuse to fire her, Herman, and that's flat. By Shakespeare, I won't do it! Miss Yates—why, she'd make a monkey out of that part! Why, look here, Herman, this girl has poise and refinement. She—"

"What do I care for that," Herman interrupted, "if she can't act?"

"She can act."

"Well, well, maybe she can. Fire her, anyway."

"I refuse," Harley said. "If she goes, I—resign."

There was a silence, while the two men looked at each other. Harley was mentally calculating whether Herman needed his services too badly at the present moment to let him go. What Herman was thinking he could not tell.

Herman looked at Harley with his heavy-lidded eyes half closed. When he spoke, however, it was with a flicker of that dry humor of which he was fond.

"Pohlman, Inc., don't accept resignations, Bert. When we don't like you, we fire you without resignations."

"I'm fired, then?" Harley asked, but with the beginnings of a grin at the corners of his mouth.

"Not so fast! You've been with us twenty years, Bert." Herman leaned back in his chair and folded his hands on his stomach. "Twenty years is a long time to talk about getting fired over a liddle fight about a girl, hey? We got a liddle fight about a girl—well, that's natural, ain't it, in this business? All right, but we don't break up twenty years for that, Bert!"

Harley completed his grin.

"You're right, Herman, but I can't let her go. I've staked my reputation on her!"

"Well, then, if you can't, you can't, Bert—that's something else again. Why didn't you say that in the first place, instead of talking about resignations? But she falls down on the first night, and then where goes your reputation? Answer me that, eh, Bert!"

"I'm not worrying about that," Harley said.

"If you're not worrying about it, then why should I worry about it, Bert? It's a liddle part, after all. The show goes on just the same if she kills it or don't kill it. Have it your own way, Bert. We stay friends, and not get up a row about a girl, eh?"

Harley thanked his chief, but he left the office shaken. Herman sometimes had rare flashes—was this one?

During the next rehearsal, the last one before the dress rehearsal, he watched Miss Haddon like a hawk. He could come only to one conclusion- she was perfect. Every line told, every gesture held, her stage presence—well, there was only one word to be applied to her, and that was "genius."

The play opened out of town, at Stamford. It was to play there two nights, then in Atlantic City for a week, and it would be brought into New York on the following Tuesday.

The Stamford opening was a triumph. The show went over with a bang. Even the usual crowd of slaughterers up from New York conceded it a hit, and some went so far as to apply the magic words "smash hit." The next morning's local paper gave a splendid write-up. Harley had asked the critic, a decent young chap, to say a word about Miss Haddon. He devoted a whole paragraph to her, and spilled adjectives.

The girl was radiant. On the second night she played with more fire than she had yet shown. After her one big scene—it was in the third act—she got a generous round of applause.

Henry Merritt said to Harley:

" Really, old chap, I think you have a find in Miss Haddon!"

Atlantic City, and a repetition of Stamford. The house manager asked:

" Say, Bert, who's the cute kid you've got playing the daughter?"

Harley wanted to slap the fellow. Instead, he said:

" She's a comer, Sims. I discovered her myself."

" You ought to get her under contract—personal contract, I mean."

The idea offended Harley. He turned and walked away.

The week was a big success. The receipts increased from night to night. The audiences, ever more friendly, applauded more heartily, demanded more and more curtains. There was a rumor that the New York ticket brokers, on the strength of the Atlantic City showing, were negotiating for a block of seats for eight weeks ahead—the first buy of the season.

Everybody was on a high wave of happiness. Even Merritt's wintry smile became almost expansive. He told Harley again that Miss Haddon was a find. Thrums ran out of superlatives.

Harley glowed with triumph all the early part of the week, but on Friday, four days before the New York opening, an immense melancholia descended upon his spirits. After the first night, there would probably be one rehearsal, and then his connection with the play would cease. Another play would go into rehearsal on Wednesday afternoon.

He met her on the boardwalk. They talked a little while, and then she said in her low, musical voice:

" I can never thank you enough, Mr. Harley. It's been a miracle to me, your kindness—your patience!"

" I have been proud," he said soberly, " and I shall be more proud. On Wednesday morning you'll be on the theatrical map. In a year, or perhaps two years, you'll be a star—I hope to Heaven," he added, " under the Pohlman management!"

After this they were silent. He was happy with a poignant happiness. For three weeks they had been together, with the tie of loved work between them. She had leaned on him, asked his advice, listened to him—she, the great, the glorious!

" There's something I ought to tell you," she said at last; " but, no—not until Wednesday."

" Is that an appointment?" he suggested, striving for lightness. " Suppose we make it luncheon?"

" I'd love it!"

" At the Rex, then, where we had our first luncheon together."

IV

New York and the first night, with sixty critics filling a block on the middle aisle, and an air of critical sophistication permeating the atmosphere—this was the test.

The first act went well. There was real applause at the end. One of the second line critics was heard to say:

" Damned good stuff!"

The second act went still better. There was more applause at the end, besides some sprinkled through the body of the act. Laugh lines brought laughs, drama reaped its reward of tense interest. There were five curtain calls.

The third act got away with a rush. The audience seemed suddenly to throw off the last vestige of its suspicious mood, and to awake to a realization that it was to be worthily entertained. It was a warm house.

Harley watched from the wings with a contented smile. In this act Miss Haddon had her big chance—the scene and exit which had gained applause at every performance in Stamford and Atlantic City.

His pose grew rigid. She was beginning. He stared, his eyes ravished, his ears ravished, his soul ravished.

" Genius!" he breathed.

She was beginning her exit line:

" Then—good night!"

She took her exit. Merritt held the stage for a second. Not a sound, not a ripple, not an isolated handclap!

Had Harley become suddenly deaf? No, for he could hear Merritt picking up his cue. Good God, what had happened?

He would go to her at once. No, he would wait till Merritt came off, and then he could carry the star's assurances to her, as well as his own.

Merritt strolled off.

"Henry, for Heaven's sake, what was the trouble with Miss Haddon's scene?"

"Didn't get over, dear boy. Don't ask me why not."

Harley, feeling that he was in a nightmare, went to her dressing room, but she had gone.

The great New York dailies varied in their criticisms. According to one expert or another, the play was strong stuff—mild but satisfying—marred by lack of humor—a trifle spoiled by injection of false humor. It ought to be good for a year, declared one prophet; it might last a month, opined another.

All this was the usual disagreement among the Olympians, but there was one word that sprang at Harley's eyes in type seemingly blacker than the rest—"miscast." He saw it in the first paper he opened. Like a witches' chorus it ran through the rest—the part of the daughter, badly miscast.

Harley reached the theater in a bewilderment bordering on panic. A rehearsal had been called for ten o'clock. Miss Threnody was the first to put in an appearance. He hurried to meet her.

"Have you seen the notices?"

"Very good, I thought."

"But—"

A boy interrupted.

"Telephone from Mr. Pohlman. He's sending around Miss Yates. He said you'd know what to do."

The boy went off, whistling.

Harley's heart sank. He gazed at Miss Threnody almost piteously.

"Tell me the truth," he said. "What's this about Miss Haddon?"

"My dear Bert!" she replied, smiling at him.

"Please!" he said desperately. "I've got to know!"

His face was wrinkled into lines of distress. Her smile faded.

"I think you will know—very soon."

"What do you mean? How can I know? Here I go and dig up a real genius, and this rotten Broadway crowd turns her down!"

"I can only repeat, my dear Bert, that you'll know very soon. If you don't by to-night's performance, come to me, and I'll tell you."

"I can't wait until to-night. I've got to know now!"

"Then make it a luncheon engagement."

"I have a luncheon engagement."

"Ah!"

"But, look here, Ada—I'll come up to your place afterward—say two o'clock."

"All right! I'll be there. In the meantime, don't let Miss Haddon pity herself, Bert. Tell her the truth."

"But here, hold on, what is the truth? You—"

She shook her head, smiled at him, and turned away to meet Merritt.

Merritt and the author took upon their shoulders the burden of the rehearsal.

"Harley's gone to pieces," the star told Lathrop, and so between them they did Harley's work for him.

Harley could only marvel at Miss Haddon. By the Lord, she was taking it well! Her successor had come, and Miss Haddon was coaching her—showing her the business. They laughed together as over some jest.

"Don't forget that we have a luncheon engagement," Harley said, as soon as the rehearsal was over.

"Wait!" She drew him aside. The other members of the cast strolled out. "I couldn't bear to have you take me to luncheon until you knew," she said. "I've deceived you."

"Deceived me?"

"I never was in stock," she said evenly. "I've never been on the Pacific Coast. I took a course at a dramatic school here in New York. I had heard how difficult it was to get a part, so I lied; but I want you to believe that if I had ever thought of what it meant to you, I wouldn't have done it. Oh, I can never forgive myself for that! I know what they're saying—about your judgment."

"I'll prove that my judgment's right," he said grimly. "I'll put you in another part, and then you'll see!"

"No—I had a long talk with Miss Threnody after the performance last night. She's too kind to deceive me, and too wise not to know. I'm not an actress."

"Not an actress!"

"No, I've been mistaken, and you've been mistaken."

"How could I be mistaken? Why, I've been in this game for twenty years! The first time I saw you out in the alley, I—"

He stopped, perspiring. A word, unbidden, had jumped to his tongue. Good God, he had nearly said:

"I loved you!"

Suddenly he knew the truth. This, then, was what Miss Threnody had meant! Fool, fool!

There is an adage that fools rush in, and so forth. Harley took a step forward.

There is another adage, or ought to be, that a man can't be unselfish and thoughtful of others all his life, and then, in a minute, change. Harley pulled himself together. He had nothing to offer her. He wasn't even a full-fledged stage director. He was nearing forty. She had youth, beauty—everything!

She was looking at him with an odd little smile.

"I think I ought to tell you," she said, "that it was not Tod Browling's fault about that letter. I made him give it to me. He said you were the easiest one in New York to work such a game on, and—"

He started back, aghast.

"I?"

"He also said," she went on evenly, "that you had vision such as few directors have—that, given a free hand, you would be a great director—one of the greatest."

He stared at her, speechless.

"I want to give you a free hand," she continued; "but first I want to tell you something else."

She paused for a moment, the odd little smile still on her lips. Harley said nothing.

"I'm to be married soon," she went on. "I wanted to be sure, first, that I hadn't a career awaiting me. I see now that I was foolish; but, as it happens, it hasn't made any difference. Bob is as much interested in the stage as I am, only now we are going at it from a different angle. Bob has a good deal of money, and so have I. We've decided to form a producing company, and we want you to join us as a partner—a partner with a free hand in the staging end." She paused, then added: "You'll do it, won't you?"

"Great Shakespeare, but he—your—the one you call Bob—he doesn't know me!"

Miss Haddon rippled into one of her low laughs.

"Oh, yes, he does, better than you know yourself. You see, I've told him."

When Albert Harley, late that night, paused to light his pipe in the stage doorway, he reflected that life is a strange thing. Something had entered into his innermost soul, and then had gone away. That would leave a scar—always.

"But, great Shakespeare, a producing manager!"

HEAVEN ON EARTH

THERE may be song beyond the stars,
  Or colors rare at rainbow's end,
But heaven's gates were prison bars
  Unless your heart beat there, my friend;
As all the gardens of this earth,
  However gay with summer flowers,
And all the joy of life and mirth
  Were Dead Sea fruit, unless warm showers
Of sympathy in sorrow blend
Your sentient soul with mine, my friend!

There may be ships on every sea—
  Seaworthy ships with compass true;
But what if all should come to me,
  All sails unfurled, save only you?
And what if blessèd hands of God
  Held mine, yet held me high above
This grass your human feet have trod—
  Too high for your dear human love?
Oh, straightway from the eternal blue,
Beloved, I'd fly to earth and you!

Anita Dudley

Mary

THE STORY OF TWO MEN AND A WOMAN

By John Scarry

STREAMERS of cold morning mist were wreathed among the sighing chemara trees. Two motionless tweed-clad figures—a man and a girl—stood side by side. It was six o'clock in the morning at Tosari, the fashionable hill resort of Java, and they had come out from the hotel to see the sun rising in glory over Gunong Raung and the nearer heights of the Idjen Plateau.

At least, that was what they said. That was what the girl had told her husband, who had probably gone to sleep again. As a matter of fact, they had come out to be together. If it had been raining bucketfuls, as upon occasion it can rain at Tosari, they would have come out just the same.

Love! It had grown overwhelmingly upon them in the few months they had known each other. It was proving to be a torturing condition, wherein neither could say whether being together or staying apart was the more painful.

They stood side by side on a wooded slope that was hidden from the roadway behind them. Mary Whiting, boyishly slender and boyishly courageous, seemed to make tremendous pretense of being absorbed in the splendor that lay about her. Her eager face was turned to the eastern glow; her nostrils drank in the odors of the morning. Not a beautiful face was hers; her features were too irregular. There was an undeniable sprinkling of freckles across her nose and under her gray eyes; but Arthur Hemmick thought her the most attractive woman he had ever seen.

He stood tall above her. He tried not to look at her. He looked, instead, for the things she had taught him to see and appreciate—the blue haze of wood smoke in the trees around the native village, the sun's conflagration in the lowest layer of clouds, the flights of wild pigeons from green thicket to tangled watercourse.

But he saw nothing. He was blind, as he had been before Mary Whiting had given him vision.

Why?

Casting about for an explanation, it occurred to Hemmick that the determination he had forced upon himself now occupied all his being. How could his eyes be expected to see the details of nature? The next few minutes would tell the whole story of his life. He was going to have it out with Mary Whiting. He was going to ask her to decide.

"Mary!" he said at last.

The girl turned toward him. Eagerness still lived in her regard, but there was a hint of apprehension, too. She waited for him to go on.

"I've been thinking."

She nodded.

"So have I."

"Of course. We can't help it. We love each other. It's a funny thing, love is. I had never thought of it—hadn't expected it, really; and now it's come to me, like this—for another man's wife!"

Hemmick could feel that the agony in Mary Whiting's eyes only mirrored his own torment. He looked away from her, and stared far across the valley. There was a little interval of silence.

"Well," he continued flatly, "I'm ready to do whatever you say, Mary."

"You put the decision up to me?"

He nodded.

"You know what my decision would be—the next boat to Singapore, and then home, and the devil take everything else in the world! That's sure. I have got no backbone left. There's nothing left of me, except love."

The girl glanced up, but did not speak.

"We can't go on this way," Hemmick resumed hoarsely. "Mary"—his face was haggard in the early light—"you know that we're only one jump away from something irrevocable. I don't know what has saved us these last few days." Suddenly he struck a tanned fist into his palm. "God!" he uttered bitterly. "Why couldn't he be a cad, or a bully, or a drunkard? Then I wouldn't hesitate. I wouldn't leave the decision to you. We'd go! We'd go, Mary, and I'd worship you forever!"

Mary Whiting dropped her face into both hands. The man saw a convulsive movement of her shoulders. It checked his vehemence, and he began to stammer swift self-reproach.

The girl's eyes were dry as she faced him again—dry, but dull with an expression of unutterable pain.

"We're killing each other," she said. "Can you go away, Arthur?"

The color drained from Hemmick's face.

"That's your decision?"

Mary nodded.

"It's got to be that," she went on. "You're right about the—something irrevocable; but there mustn't be. We couldn't do that, Arthur—you and I." A pleading note crept into her low tones. "Oh, I love you enough, but we can't be dishonest. And I can't leave Charlie. I can't hurt him. I never loved him, that's true; but he's good, and I know he loves me. So you'll go away?"

Hemmick made a slight affirmative sign. He could not speak.

"You can?" she pressed.

"Yes — I'll go down to Surabaya tonight. I'll telegraph the head office for a transfer — Batavia, Singapore, anywhere. They'll do it," he said dully.

Then he saw the girl dash the back of her hand across her eyes. It was borne to him that her suffering was no whit less than his own. She must not suffer—Mary! He must make it as easy as possible for her.

"And we'll get over this," he declared heartily. "You wait and see. A couple of years, perhaps, and we'll be laughing about the flirtation we had!"

"Flirtation?"

Hemmick made a gesture of hopelessness.

"I'll never laugh," was all he could say.

"Nor I."

Then Mary Whiting turned toward the path which led through the chemaras back to the roadway and the hotel. Hemmick tried to fall in beside her. It seemed to him as if he was making a conscious effort to choke the words that were rising to his lips; but he failed.

"Mary—"

She faced him.

"Will you kiss me, Mary—once?"

He saw her come slowly forward. Her face was pale; the freckles he loved stood out darker and more distinct. His hands went to her arms, to her shoulders. There seemed to be something of terror in her bearing as she spoke.

"I can't say no. I haven't the strength. I want to kiss you. I want to, Arthur; but if I do, I know I shall ask you not to go away!"

Slowly he released her.

"Let's go, Mary," he said.

Together they climbed the slope. In some places the path was steep, and slippery with fallen chemara needles. Hemmick went ahead. Two or three times he half turned and gave a steadying hand to the girl. Once on the road, they held to the right, and followed a level path to the compound in front of the main building of the hotel.

"I don't want any breakfast," said Mary Whiting.

Without another word she went across to her bungalow.

II

Nor did Hemmick want to eat; but sheer habit was taking him into the hotel and to the breakfast room.

He had not yet begun to feel the pain of his loss. Indeed, he could feel nothing. The situation was so unreal that he doubted the evidence of all his senses. If it only turned out to be a frightful nightmare! But no such luck. These steps were of stone, this flooring of wood — no dream stuffs!

Then he found himself among white-covered tables. A cheerful hail greeted him from one corner.

"Oh, Hemmick!"

Never was greeting less welcome. Even before looking Hemmick knew that Charlie Whiting was calling him—the last man in Java he wanted to see. A bewildered oath sprang to his lips, but there was no escape, no way of pretending he had not heard. Muttering, he went to Whiting's table.

In spite of everything, Hemmick had never descended to hating this husband of the woman he loved. No one in Java hated Charlie Whiting. He was a fat, good-natured fellow, manager of the American Kapok Company's office in Surabaya. He was known to be stubborn, as a fat man often can be; but the worst Hemmick could say about him was that he could talk more on any subject than any American in the Far East.

" Gosh!" he began. " Fine pair of early birds, you and my wife! How do you get that way? I wouldn't go across the street to see the reddest sunrise there ever was; but I have to get up, anyhow. Fat chance I've got to sleep when Mary starts out! Where is she now?"

" Gone to her room."

" Huh! Sit down, Arthur—have breakfast here. The sausage is great. I like it with that cheese they get out from Holland. But the coffee—Lord! You'd think you'd get real coffee in Java, but the mud they hand out! What you going to do to-day?"

" I'm going down to Surabaya to-night."

Whiting looked up from his sausage in some surprise.

" Business?"

Hemmick nodded.

" But you won't go down till five o'clock," Whiting objected. " What you doing till then?"

The other was not to be caught. Whiting could stick like a leech, and Hemmick did not want Mary's husband at his heels all day. There would be murder done! So he mentally vetoed golf—the only sport Whiting ever attempted.

" Why, I'm going out for snipe. That 'll give my boy a chance to get everything packed."

Whiting slapped his pudgy fingers on the table edge.

" Snipe! Fine! I'll go with you. You'll let me take a gun, won't you? You know, Arthur, I could hit 'em once—quail, duck, anything. Just what I want—a chance to prove my eye's still with me!"

Hemmick's mouth drew into a hard line.

" I'm going fast and far, Charlie," he warned. " Some other day, perhaps. To-day—well, to-day I've got a touch of liver to walk off; and when I walk, I run."

Whiting snorted.

" Oh, Lord, I'll keep up with you—don't you worry about that! You're afraid I'll outshoot you, that's what! Just give me your second-best gun. When do we start?"

" I'm off in five minutes."

" I'll be ready in three. All I've got to do is to sling on a pair of puttees. See you at your bungalow. You've got plenty of shells?"

With that Charlie Whiting lumbered out of the breakfast room. Hemmick cursed and cursed under his breath. He had to curse; otherwise he would burst into insane laughter, or weeping. Charlie Whiting with him all day!

Hemmick hurried through his meal. If Whiting was so much as a minute late, he told himself that he would leave without him.

But Whiting was on time. Three minutes later the two men struck down from Tosari toward the rice swamps that lie under the shoulder of Mount Widodaren.

" What's in that leather case?" asked Whiting. " Field glasses?"

" Flask of brandy."

" Huh! No wonder you've got a touch of liver!"

Hemmick said never a word. He wondered if this could be punishment inflicted upon him for his love of Mary Whiting.

III

THERE would be murder done! In some subtle fashion that despairing exaggeration was changing in Hemmick's mind into a definite statement of fact. Here was the clumsy husband of the woman he loved beyond his power to describe; and here was the howling wilderness.

" Jove!" he thought incredulously. " I must have a touch of liver, at that!"

Between Tosari and the rice swamps where flew the snipe lay some four miles of mountainous jungle. It was easy traveling at first, downhill. A thick-fringed creek about a mile from the hotel was the gunners' first obstacle; but Hemmick knew the locality, and found a ford without difficulty. After that came good going again for a quarter of a mile, until virgin forest blocked the way over the next ridge.

Here branches caught at them, and the up grades made Whiting gasp. Hemmick climbed like a fiend, or like a man trying to shake off a fiend; but Whiting kept at his heels. There was nothing of the quitter about the fat man.

A wild land—a district of wooded hills and rocky cliffs, of foaming, rushing streams and cascades, of tiny lakes—red-rimmed, deep blue against the surrounding jungle. A thousand chances to do a man to death without leaving a sign to betray the murderer!

Hemmick had never had a criminal urge in his life. He did not know how to handle the one that now possessed him. Angrily shaking his head, like a tormented buffalo, availed him nothing.

It occurred to the man that conversation might have some effect toward banishing his brain's fearsome guest. He battled his way around a jagged outcropping of rock, dug his heels deep on a precipitous slope, and issued through a belt of towering ironwoods upon the bank of a swollen creek.

" Tough going, eh?" he remarked. " It 'll be better once we cross this *kali.*"

" I hope it will," was Whiting's fervent response.

" Better let me take your gun. It's a case of jump or swim here."

Whiting took one look at the river and the causeway of stepping stones ahead of him. Then he handed over his gun without demur.

" If you don't think you can make it, turn back, Charlie," Hemmick advised. " You've got to be sure-footed. God knows what's downstream!"

" I'll make it," said Whiting; " but you go first."

Five, six zigzaggy jumps; Hemmick crossed the stream without difficulty.

He turned on the other side to watch Whiting. The man had already started across. His huge khaki-clad body loomed bigger than ever as he leaped from stone to stone. He had just accomplished what was for him no mean jump, and now stood precariously poised on one foot. All he had to do was keep going; but he made the mistake of looking too far ahead.

An expression of alarm froze on his countenance. His arms began to cut circles. His body was unprepared for other than forward movement, but his mind refused the succeeding flight. With a choking cry of surprise and fear he hovered for a second, then tumbled into the foam.

Hemmick flew into action. He shed boots, sun helmet, and guns as he ran. Not hesitating for a second, he plunged head first into the torrent.

Whiting was not a strong swimmer. Indeed, it was a wonder that Hemmick was able to keep himself afloat. There was a downward suck to the current that dragged him under water more than half the time. If it had been necessary for him to battle the stream at all, he probably could not have done it. As it was, however, he let himself go, swimming as he got the chance. Presently, he was able to clutch Whiting's shock of thick hair.

The big man was not unconscious, but he had swallowed a lot of water, and his struggles had tired him. He was not able to help Hemmick's attempt to rescue him; nor, on the other hand, could he hinder it.

Hemmick kept his eyes open for a place to land. Somewhere, he figured, the current must swerve close to a calm pool near the shore. It seemed probable that he would be able to steer himself into the safety of the first backwater.

It was not to be so easy. Instead of receding, the river banks drew closer and closer together. The stream itself thrashed and roared in increasing fury, driving ahead with the force and speed of a hurricane. On and on it swept the two men between precipitous cliffs.

The situation was rapidly getting to be more than Hemmick had bargained for. He did not hear the roar of any waterfall ahead. The pounding of water all around him prevented glimpses into chasms to come; yet a premonition of worse buffeting entered his mind. Self-preservation seemed to demand that he should relinquish his hold on Whiting.

But he could never do that!

Hemmick's impossible thoughts of murder were gone from his mind. Curiously, he now knew in his heart that he would sooner let go of his own brother than he would of this husband of Mary Whiting's. The mere fact that he himself would find happiness in Whiting's death gave strength to his cramped fingers. Let him go? They would go together.

Then the current slid Hemmick upon an inclined rock in the middle of the river. All he knew for a minute was that he was no longer moving. Nor could he stand. His fingers still twined desperately in Whiting's hair; and Whiting's body whirled in the tug of the water.

Hemmick hardly dared to move, for the spray in his eyes prevented clear vision. Slowly, however, with a herculean effort, he dragged his limp companion upon the submerged shelf beside him.

Then he had a chance to look around. What he saw was appalling. Save for the fortunate trick of the river that had washed him upon the rock, both he and Whiting would have dropped some ten feet into a caldron of jagged rocks and boiling water.

No human being could have got out of it alive.

Even now their ultimate safety was doubtful. The rock on which he knelt was three or four inches under water, but Hemmick could see that it was no more than four feet square. On both sides of it thundered and raced ten-yard stretches of the river that had cast them up.

Hemmick gave his attention to Whiting, whom he was still holding fast. The man sagged limply, but he was not in a state of collapse. He gasped. Water ran out of his mouth. It was not long, however, until he could take care of himself. His head turned toward Hemmick.

"All right, Whiting?"

"Sure!"

Then Whiting said nothing for two or three minutes. He was drawing deep lungfuls of air.

"We ought to be able to walk ashore," he managed at last. "I've drunk enough water to dry up any stream!"

Hemmick grunted and stared. A silent compliment arose within him for this man who could crack jokes on the very edge of death.

"Ah, you did it, Arthur! Thanks—for I'm an awful dub. How do we get out?"

"Wait till some one finds us, I guess."

"Fine! When 'll that be? Br-r-r! Wish I was wearing tweeds. This khaki's like paper."

"Have a spot of brandy?"

"No."

"It 'll warm you up."

"Pah!"

So they clung there. From time to time Hemmick made the woods ring with cries for help, in English or Malay.

Half an hour later the weather had changed. Great white clouds of mist started drifting up the stream, obscuring the sun and blanketing the two men in a clammy, cold covering. Then the clouds became one cloud, and that cloud stayed. Even Hemmick's tweeds were scant protection. Nowhere in the world can a man feel colder than in the tropics when the mercury drops below seventy degrees.

"Time for medicine," Hemmick declared. "Good thing I didn't have time to drop it!"

He opened the leather case on his belt, and produced a squat brandy flask. He offered it to Whiting, who shook his head.

"I don't drink."

"Don't be a damned fool!" said Hemmick sharply. "It 'll keep you from getting a chill."

"I'm not very cold."

"You're shivering."

"I'd rather shiver than drink that stuff."

Hemmick shrugged.

"It's here if you want it," he said.

Then he drank half the brandy, and put the flask back into its case.

IV

There followed an hour of acute discomfort, mental as well as physical, for Hemmick was losing the instinctive unselfishness that had carried him into the river after Whiting. The brandy episode rankled. The blockhead! He should have let the stubborn fool drown!

That brought back his earlier aberrations. He tried to shut them out of his mind, but they returned persistently. In strange inward turmoil, Hemmick wondered if he was drunk. Could he be so low as to consider killing a man?

Suddenly, before he knew it, he found himself setting his foot in such a position that a single thrust with it would push Whiting back into the stream; but Mary Whiting's eyes deterred him. Mary! The thought of her made him sane again. He twisted away from Whiting, trembling.

Then, on the bank, a shouting pierced the cloud.

"*Tuan! Tuan!*"

With the help of Whiting's shoulder, Hemmick got carefully to his feet. He could see no movement, but he knew the visibility was better for the native ashore.

"*Ayoh, man—tooloong!*" he bellowed above the noise of the boiling river. "*Kassi bamboo!*"

"*Saya, tuan!*"

Whiting had no comment to make. He was undoubtedly too cold.

For a while Hemmick listened to the staccato of *parang* strokes on a bamboo stem; but it was ten minutes before the native dropped it across into the white man's eager grasp. Hemmick jammed the five-inch butt against the rock, under water, and in such fashion that the force of the stream would hold it the more firmly—or so he thought.

"Go to it, Charlie!"

"It 'll hold?"

"It wouldn't break with four times your weight. Go ahead!"

Whiting edged into the water. He straddled the bamboo, and began hitching himself toward shore.

Hemmick watched the rock, where the butt was submerged. Suddenly he saw the butt slowly rolling up toward him; and suddenly he decided that it was not his fault. If the butt came up, it came up.

The native was holding the other end. Let Whiting cling fast and pull himself in—or drown. He never could do it, with his pudgy fingers; but it was none of Hemmick's affair.

Another inch and the butt would slip. Mary! Shuddering, Hemmick jammed both heels down on the bamboo and checked its upward progress.

Presently, through the riot in his brain, he heard Whiting's voice.

" All right, Arthur! Come across!"

Two hours later, utterly spent, they both reached the hotel.

" You still intend to go down?" asked Whiting.

" Directly."

" Huh! Glad I'm not going! I'll tell Mary you saved my life—for you sure did, Arthur. Boy, I'll never forget it! See you in Surabaya, of course."

" Of course," Hemmick lied. He hoped to be gone before the Whitings got down from their holiday. " And, Charlie," he concluded earnestly, " you take a good stiff hot drink, and get under the blankets."

" Oh, I'm all right!"

Hemmick went into his bungalow. Well, that agony was over. There would be no more of it — no farewells — nothing. He would just go, as she had asked him to do. Mary! Thank God she had come to his side there in the river! Murder—ugh!

His boy had packed everything except a linen suit for the journey to Surabaya; but there were plenty of rugs. Hemmick took a hot bath, a cold shower, and a stinging drink of brandy. Then he let his boy take the wheel and break all speed laws down through Pasoeroean and Porong to Surabaya.

In the morning he went down to the office. Jenkins, his assistant in the Pennsylvania Oil Company, met him at the door.

" Hello, Hemmick! What the deuce are you back for?"

" Sick of it."

" When 'd you come down?"

" Yesterday evening."

" Then you haven't heard the news?"

Hemmick gave his colleague a sharp look of inquiry.

" Whiting's dead," said Jenkins. " Just got a telephone from the Kapok Company. Seems he got a soaking, and pneumonia got him last night. They're burying him this morning."

Hemmick sank into the nearest chair.

V

Four days later Mary Whiting came down to Surabaya to sail for the States. The American Kapok Company had arranged all details of her passage. Hemmick had no idea what to do. He had no doubt about her love for him, but he hesitated to intrude his own love. Still, he had to see her.

" You saved his life," she said. " He told me."

" Mary, it was because you were beside me all the time."

She nodded. She seemed to understand.

" You'll be home on furlough next year?"

" And I'm coming to you," he blurted.

Mary did not speak, and she did not smile; but as the deck echoed with the cry of " *Niet-passagiers van boord,*" Hemmick saw a look in the girl's eyes that gave promise of happiness immeasurably above his worth.

BLUE WORLDS

Your eyes hold two worlds, sky and sea—
Blue worlds for me.

Although futility's a sapphire knife
To fashion life;

Although I know you will not hear,
Each newer year

I'll keep my skies and oceans blue
For you!

Mary Louise Mabie

His Remarkable Future

THE STORY OF A RAPTUROUS BUT SOMEWHAT TUMULTUOUS ENGAGEMENT

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

"HAVEN'T you any umbrella?" asked Hardy, with a frown.

"I have one," answered Miss Patterson, "but not here."

She was dignified, he was somewhat severe. Both were important, preoccupied, adult persons, full of business concerns; nevertheless, they did not quite know how to proceed with the conversation. They stood side by side in the lobby of the office building, looking not at all at each other, but at the steady and violent rain. Miss Patterson was reluctant to walk off in such a downpour, and Hardy was determined that she should not.

"Silly kid!" he thought. "In that flimsy suit and those fool shoes!"

Any number of other girls ran past, some with newspapers over their hats, some laughing, some gravely worried, but he was not perturbed by them. They could stand it. No other living girl was so peculiarly fragile as Miss Patterson, or beset with so many dangers.

"I think it will stop," said she.

This annoyed him. She was trying to make light of a most serious situation.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because it always does stop," she said. "At least, it always has, in the past."

He turned his head to look at her, and he grew a little dizzy. In the bleak light of that dismal day, Miss Patterson seemed to glow with a strange radiance. Her light hair was like a nimbus under her hat, her blue eyes were lambent, and she chose just that moment to make the color deepen in her cheeks. It was not fair!

"I'll get a taxi," he said.

"Oh, no!" she protested. "Please don't! I live miles and miles uptown."

"Doesn't matter," said Hardy, and off he darted.

He stopped a cab with the air of a highwayman, and returned to Miss Patterson. As he put her into the vehicle, a curious change came over them. Hardy ceased to be masterful and severe, and Miss Patterson was no longer dignified. They looked at each other steadily, with a strange sort of despair.

"Look here!" said Hardy, in an uncertain voice. "Can't I come with you?"

"Oh, no!" cried she. "Oh, no! Oh, you'd better not!"

But they both knew that he was going with her, that he must, that the inevitable moment had come, the moment foreseen by both of them all through the winter.

"What's the address?" he asked.

That was the last thing needed. Now he knew where the human, unofficial Miss Patterson lived. She was disassociated from business now. She was not a typist, but a girl.

She seemed aware of all this, for, as he got into the cab beside her, she looked at him in a new way—a look so bright, so clear, so gentle!

"Look here!" he said. "I—I don't want to be a nuisance. If you'd really rather I didn't come—"

She only shook her head. If she had tried to speak, she would have ended in tears.

He didn't know that he, too, had a new look—that his young face had grown pale and strained, his eyes dark with his great fear and his great hope. And this was the splendid, vainglorious Mr. Hardy from the import department, the young man of whom great things were expected, who was to be made assistant buyer when Mr. Hallock left at the end of the year.

The other girls had talked about him a good deal, for he was a figure to capture the imagination—a handsome boy, swaggering a little in the honest pride of his young manhood; only twenty-three, and going to be made assistant buyer!

"You know," he said, "I've often wanted to—to have a little talk with you. I—I often noticed you."

"Did you?" said Miss Patterson, ready to laugh through her unshed tears, for he needn't have troubled to tell her that.

"But you see," he went on, "I didn't know—I couldn't tell whether you—"

She was very glad to hear that, because sometimes she had been afraid that he could tell, could read in her face what was in her heart.

"You know, you're so different from any one else," he said. "Every time I saw you, I—whenever I saw you, it seemed—that is, I thought you were so different from any one else."

He stopped, aware that he was doing very badly, and filled with horror at his own idiotic words. She would think he was a fool.

Yet how could he possibly convey to this ethereal, fragile, and unworldly creature any idea of his own tempestuous love without alarming and offending her? He had no business to love her. It was a gross impertinence. She was an angel, and he was nothing but a clumsy—

The taxi turned a corner sharply, and he was flung sidewise, so that his shoulder brushed hers.

"I'm sorry!" he cried earnestly. "I couldn't help it!"

"But you're soaking wet!" said Miss Patterson.

Her gloved hand rested on his shoulder, and her voice—no, impossible!

"You're not—crying?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, I am," said Miss Patterson. "I am. I can't bear to—to think of your getting so wet and catching a cold—just to get me a—a taxi!"

"But I shan't catch cold," said Hardy. He was trying to bear in mind that her words, her tears, were nothing but an expression of her wonderful kindness and humanity. She would be sorry for any one who got wet and caught a cold in her service. That was all that she meant—absolutely all. "I shan't catch cold," he went on. "I never do; but you—you see, you're so delicate—"

"I'm not!" said she. "Not a bit! But I remember perfectly well that last February you had the most—oh, the most awful cold!"

"Edith!" cried he, astounded, overwhelmed by this confession. "You remember *that?*"

Miss Patterson suddenly drew away, and ceased weeping.

"Well, yes," she admitted. "I—yes, I remember."

A silence.

"Then you must—must feel a little interested in me," said Hardy.

Silence.

"I hope you do," added Hardy.

The worst silence of all.

"Why do you hope that?" she asked, in a blank, small voice.

"Because I—ever since the first time I saw you, I thought perhaps you'd noticed."

"Noticed what?" inquired Miss Patterson, and he fancied that there was a shade of coldness in her voice. He was in despair. Of course she had no idea what he was driving at, he was so appallingly clumsy and stupid about it. He must do better than this! He drew a long breath.

"My prospects are pretty good," he remarked. "They're going to make me assistant buyer at the end of the year."

"So I've heard," said she, and this time there was no mistaking the coldness in her tone.

"I didn't say that to boast," he assured her anxiously. "I only wanted to tell you because—I wanted you to know that I—"

"I shouldn't blame you for boasting," said Miss Patterson, in a polite, formal way. "Every one says you have a remarkable future before you."

"Not without you!" he cried. "I don't want any future without you! Oh, Edith, I don't know how to tell you—"

The head of the auditing department, in which Miss Patterson worked, often praised her for the quickness with which she grasped new ideas. This praise seemed justified, for she understood Hardy without further explanation.

Nevertheless, they both had an enormous amount of explaining to do. All the way uptown they were engaged in explaining to each other, with the greatest earnestness, just how they felt, why they felt so, and when they had begun to feel so. When they reached the depressing West Side street where Edith lived, they hadn't half finished.

The taxi stopped, and the driver turned around, so that they couldn't go on explaining, or even say good-by; but Hardy went into the dingy little vestibule with his Edith.

"Darling girl!" he said. "Shan't I come upstairs with you and see your aunt?"

She turned away.

"I'd rather you didn't, Joe," she said. "Not just now, please!"

He was willing to do anything in the world she wanted, except to leave her; but that was almost impossible. She seemed to him so forlorn, so little and so young. The brightness had left her face now. She was downcast and pale.

"Edith!" he said. "Aren't you happy at home?"

"No, Joe, I'm not," she answered. "I'm wretched!"

When she saw what that did to him, how much it hurt him, she was overcome with remorse.

"Oh, but it doesn't matter—now!" she said. "Not now—when I have you. Really and truly, Joe, I don't care a bit!"

Her anxiety to reassure him, to send him away happy, touched Hardy almost beyond endurance. He had always been aware of something wistful, something a little sorrowful about her, like a shadow over her clear beauty. She had been the dearer to him for that. She was a thousand times dearer to him now because she was sad, and must look to him for her happiness. He meant to make her happy — at any cost!

II

THOSE words, "at any cost," did not come consciously into Hardy's mind. He didn't really believe that happiness cost anything—or love, either. You found them, suddenly, on your way through life, and of course you had a right to keep what you found.

He did see difficulties, though. His prospects were good, but in his immediate present there were many things that troubled him.

His chief trouble was one which young fellows of twenty-three who want to get married have encountered before. It was money. His salary of twenty-five hundred a year was more than he needed for his own wants, and he had done a very sensible thing—he had begun buying stock in the company that employed him, turning in ten dollars of his salary every week for this purpose. He had four hundred dollars saved in that way, but no one ever repented a folly more heartily than young Hardy now regretted his prudence.

He couldn't touch that money. He knew very well that one of Mr. Plummer's strongest reasons for promoting him was that infernal stock he was buying. If he were to sell it, or to stop his payments, Mr. Plummer would want to know why, and Hardy's prospects would be in jeopardy. He couldn't marry without those prospects, nor could he very well get married without the money.

Well, any wise and experienced person could solve that difficulty for him. He must wait. Even Edith, who was neither wise nor experienced, told him that. They were having lunch together a few days after their great discovery of happiness, and Hardy had been explaining the situation in detail.

"We'll have to wait," said Edith. "Anyhow—"

"No," said he. "I can't stand seeing you so miserable!"

"But I'd be a hundred times more miserable if I thought I was doing you any harm!" said Edith.

As soon as the words were spoken, she realized that she had made a serious mistake, and tried hastily to remedy it.

"I'm really not miserable, Joe!" she cried. "Not a bit!"

He knew better, though. Without even having seen her, he was becoming acquainted with Edith's aunt, and learning to appreciate her talent for making people miserable. Edith never told him about it. It wasn't her habit to complain, but to any one who watched her as Hardy did, the thing was obvious.

One evening, when he was walking to the Subway with her, she had to stop in the drug store to buy a bottle of "nerve tonic" at two dollars a bottle.

"You don't take that stuff, do you, Edith?" he had asked anxiously.

"Oh, no!" she replied. "It's for Aunt Bessie. She's in very poor health, you know."

"What's the matter with her?" Hardy bluntly inquired.

He did not fail to notice Edith's troubled face and rising color; and the answer that Aunt Bessie was "terribly nervous" seemed to him to explain a good deal.

Then he learned that Aunt Bessie was upset if Edith was a few minutes late in getting home, and that she would be still more painfully upset if Edith should even suggest going out in the evening.

"She's alone all day, you see," the girl explained, "and it does seem selfish to go out again."

"Oh, *very* selfish!" Hardy interrupted. "And what about Saturday afternoon and Sunday?"

"Well, you see, Joe, she's alone all week, and—and she hasn't any one but me. Anyhow, Joe, we see each other every day in the office, and we can have lunch together, can't we?"

He said nothing more just then, for he could see that Edith was unhappy and anxious. For those first few days even having lunch with her was almost too good to be true; but the day when Edith said they must wait, and Hardy said he wouldn't, was Monday, after he had spent a horrible Sunday without a glimpse of her.

"No," he said again. "We can't go on like this. I can't, anyhow."

Again she pointed out that they saw each other every day in the office, and could have lunch together. She added that they had only been engaged five days.

"I know," said he. "It would be all right if I could see you, but you won't let me come to your house, and you won't go out with me."

"But we see each other—"

"Yes, and we can have lunch together, for the next ten years, I suppose!" Hardy interrupted.

"It won't be anything like ten years, you silly boy! At the end of the year, when you—"

"Yes, and do you know what's going to happen then? They're going to send me to Europe, with Preble, for two months."

"Oh!" cried Edith.

For a moment she was silent, overcome by this news. Then she made a gallant attempt at a reasonable, calm, businesslike manner.

"But, after all—two months!" she said.

Her smile was a very poor one, and her voice betrayed her. Instead of helping her, Hardy became unmanageable.

"Look here!" he said. "September, October, November — that's three months that we can have lunch together. Then I'll be away for December and January; so perhaps after five months I may have a chance to — kiss you once more, if your aunt doesn't mind. Five whole months, and you won't let me see you alone for five minutes!"

"Oh, Joe, darling! Do be reasonable!"

"You're a little too reasonable," said he. "If you really cared for me—"

There is no better way to begin a quarrel than with those classic words. Edith grew angry, but her anger was such a mild little thing compared to Hardy's that she took refuge in flight, and left him sitting alone in the restaurant. All was over!

That afternoon they had four hours to think over their words. When Edith came downstairs, Hardy was waiting for her in the lobby.

"Edith!" he said. "Edith! I don't know how I could have been such a brute! Edith, I can't—"

"Oh, Joe, you weren't! I know it must seem heartless to you for me to talk that way; but you don't understand, Joe!"

As they walked toward the Subway, she tried to tell him. It was the hottest hour of that sultry September day, and she looked so jaded, so pale, that he was frightened. He held her arm, his tall head bent, to catch every word, his eyes fixed on her face.

"You see," she said, "I owe so much to Aunt Bessie. She took me when I was a tiny girl, after mother died, and she gave up everything for me — everything, Joe! She used the little bit of money she had to send me to a good school, and when that was gone she went to work. That's what ruined her health—working in an office; and she did it for me, Joe. If she's a little —a little trying now, I—you do see, don't you, Joe?"

"Yes, my darling girl, I see," he answered, more gently than she had ever heard him speak before. "I think—see here, Edith! Could you spare time for a soda?"

She thought she could. They went into a shop near by, and sat down at a little table in a dark corner. He stretched out his hand toward hers, which lay on the table, but he drew it back again. He wasn't going to do anything that might bother her, never again. He would be patient, he would do anything in the world she wanted. He was sick with remorse and alarm at her pallor and fatigue.

"I'll do whatever you want, Edith," he said. "Only — I love you so! If you would just tell me more about yourself! It's hard not to know."

It was her hand that grasped his.

"As if I didn't understand! Oh, Joe, I worried so awfully about you that time you got wet! If you had been sick, I couldn't have been with you. I didn't even know who there'd be to take care of you."

"Don't!" he said suddenly. "Please don't, little Edith! I don't need much taking care of. It's you! Do you mind telling me what—how you—how it is with you financially?"

She did tell him, readily and frankly, and he was appalled. She was supporting herself and her aunt on her meager salary. Two persons entirely dependent on this slip of a girl!

"Edith!" he said. "Won't you marry me now? My salary's enough for us to scrape along on."

Both her hands clasped his now.

"Joe, my own dearest, I can't!"

"We can take your aunt to live with us for a while, until I've got my raise."

"Joe, we can't!"

"I don't care how bad she is. If you can stand her, I can."

"You couldn't! Don't you see, Joe, that that would spoil everything? We couldn't start like that. But if you'd—"

"If I'd what?"

"Nothing!" she said hastily. "I'll tell you another time."

But instead of telling him, she left a note on his desk the next morning.

DEAR JOE:
I will marry you now, if you won't ask me to give up my job.

"I don't wonder you wrote it," said Hardy, when he met her for lunch.

"Joe, it's the only way!"

"It's not *my* way," said he.

She reminded him that he had promised her to do whatever she wanted, and he replied that he would do so—except in this instance.

"Well, I won't let you have the burden of taking care of Aunt Bessie," she told him. "It's bad enough for you to think of getting married, anyhow, when you're so young, and just at the beginning of a wonderful career—"

"Young, am I? Then what about you?" he asked. "No! When you marry me, you'll be done with offices. That's something I won't argue about."

She pretended to be angry, but in her heart she adored him when he was magnificent and arbitrary.

III

"IT isn't really a lie," said Edith. "I really do go to the French class."

"It's too near a lie to suit me," said Hardy bluntly. "I'm sick of this hole-and-corner business. It's—can't you see for yourself that it's degrading to both of us? Edith, can't we be honest about this? Let me go and see your aunt, and tell her the whole thing. If she makes a row, I dare say I can live through it."

"I dare say *you* could," Edith answered briefly.

They were coming near to one of the gates of Central Park. Their walk together was almost at an end—a walk which only a few weeks ago would have been a delight almost unsupportable, a thing to lie awake at night remembering, to think of all through a busy day. Now that rapture, that glamour, was gone. With all their love, their hope, their blind tenderness for each other, they were bitter at heart.

It was a wild, bright October evening. The moon seemed rocking in the fitful clouds, the wind sprang like a kitten along the paths after the dry leaves, the bare trees creaked stiff and resistant. All the world was in motion, restless, hurried. All things were free—except themselves. It was intolerable to Hardy, an affront to his fine young pride in himself, his magnificent assurance. It was petty, base, shameful!

"Edith!" he said suddenly. "I won't go on like this!"

She stopped short in the middle of the path.

"I'm tired of hearing that," she replied, in a queer, unsteady voice. "You're always saying that—always blaming me; and you know we've got to go on like this—or not go on at all!"

"We haven't. That's what I'm always trying to tell you," he said stormily. "We don't have to meet this way—in this beastly, lying way—pretending to your aunt that your French lesson is for two hours instead of one, so that we can have one hour a week alone together. Tell her! Let her be upset! She'll have to know some time. Then at least I can come to see you in your own place, decently and honorably."

"I will not tell her now! You don't

realize what it 'll mean to Aunt Bessie. You don't care. She hasn't any one but me. I *won't* tell her now, and let her have all that long time to think about—losing me. She's going to be happy as long as possible."

Hardy took her arm.

"Come on," he said, "or you'll be ten minutes late, and she'll have a nervous attack and keep you up all night, as usual!"

But when he felt how she was shivering in her thin jacket, a terrible compunction seized him.

"Oh, Edith!" he cried. "Edith, never mind all that! Darling little Edith, it's only *our* affair, after all! Let's get married now, before I go!"

"You know we can't," she said, with a sob. "Not when you're so obstinate and—and unkind. You know we couldn't manage for ourselves and Aunt Bessie, too, in any place where she'd be comfortable, just on your salary; and you're so unreasonable about my job!"

"Look here, Edith—I'll sell that blamed stock, and that 'll provide for Aunt Bessie until I've got my raise."

"You won't! You shan't!" She pulled her arm away from him, and roughly wiped away the tears running down her cheeks. "Don't you dare to mention such a thing! I'm not going to ruin your whole life just for—"

"Well, you've ruined it!" said Hardy. "I can tell you that, if it's any satisfaction to you. I don't care now what happens to me, or whether I go on or not. You've shown me how little you care for me. You've—Edith!"

She had started running along the path, but he easily overtook her. All at once their arms were about each other, Edith's wet cheek against his, and all their pain, their bitterness, lost in a passion of tenderness and remorse.

IV

STILL Hardy went about the office, magnificent as ever, very well aware of being a remarkable young fellow, who was to be made assistant buyer at twenty-three, a man talked about, admired, and envied. He was still proud of himself, still sure of himself, but some of the magic had gone out of it, some of the zest. He couldn't look forward to that trip to Europe with unmixed joy now.

Indeed, all the joys he had at this time were so mixed with anxiety and impatience that he could scarcely recognize them. He dreaded leaving Edith. He imagined all sorts of misfortunes that might befall her in his absence. Sometimes he even resented his splendid future, because it so burdened and harassed the present. He wanted to live *now,* not to wait.

Worst of all was the humiliation he endured from their furtive and hasty meetings. He had never before in his life been furtive, or even cautious. He had lived boldly and rashly, in the light of day, and it hurt and angered him to do otherwise. He wanted to love boldly and rashly. He wanted to be proud of his love.

Well, he wasn't proud; he was ashamed.

He couldn't understand Edith's viewpoint. Her life had been so repressed, so weighted down by unjust and inordinate demands upon her, that she was thankful for the briefest minutes of happiness. If she could meet Hardy for ten minutes on a street corner, she was joyous for those ten minutes—when he would let her be. He tried to let her. He would watch her coming toward him—such a gallant little figure!—and he would make up his mind to be tender and considerate; but when she was with him, when he saw her ill dressed and ill nourished, and couldn't help her, when he saw her glance at her watch even when he was speaking, his good resolutions only too often vanished, and he reproached her bitterly.

She didn't endure his reproaches meekly. He wouldn't have loved her, if she had. On the contrary, she replied to him vigorously, and so many, many times they had left each other in anger, to be paid for later by hours of remorse.

Neither of them was quarrelsome by nature, nor was there any lack of real harmony between them. They were both generous, quick to forgive, eager to understand, passionately loyal to each other. Every one of their disagreements would have been quickly adjusted and forgotten, if they had had time; but they never did have time, and neither did this fellow of twenty-three and this girl of twenty have any greater amount of patience and ripe wisdom than others of their age.

Sometimes a sort of panic seized them, and they felt it necessary to "explain." They had fallen into the habit of taking a little more than the allotted hour for lunch. Though Edith had been solemnly warned by her superior, she found it impossible to leave Joe in the middle of a speech. He was so unreasonable about her always being in a hurry.

So there was lunch almost every day, and the walk to the Subway, and that hour stolen from the French class once a week, all through October and November, until the trip to Europe was only a few weeks ahead of them. Mr. Plummer hadn't actually told Hardy he was to go, but the thing was understood. Mr. Loomis, the buyer, was taking pains to train him, and had once or twice said such things as:

"You'll see how that is for yourself, Hardy, when you're in France."

"It 'll probably be before Christmas," said Hardy. "The idea is that I'm not to be told until Hallock is gone, because I might slack up on my present work. Silly, childish way to do—as if it was a treat for a good boy!"

"Well, it will be a treat, won't it?" said Edith. "You've always—"

He looked across the table at her. The cold air had brought no color into her cheeks. She looked weary, downcast. He could see that her smile was an effort, and in her eyes was the look that he couldn't bear.

"No!" he said. "I wish to Heaven I wasn't going! I mean it! If I have to leave you like this—"

"Joe," she began, and was silent for a minute. "I—I know it's selfish of me; but—oh, Joe, when I think of your going away—"

Mr. Plummer, who was also taking lunch in that restaurant, saw his promising young man lean across the table and lay his hand on that of Miss Patterson from the auditing department.

"Too bad!" thought Mr. Plummer. "A boy with a remarkable future before him—and getting himself entangled before he's begun! Too bad! Too bad!"

Fortunately, however, he could not hear what monstrous folly the boy spoke.

"I won't go, Edith! I'll stay here with you. Nothing else counts with me but you—only you. I'll—"

"I want you to go, Joe, darling," said she, with quivering lips; "but I thought—only I know you wouldn't! I—if we could just get married before you go, and not tell any one till you come back—just so that we'd really belong to each other—then it wouldn't be so hard!"

And Hardy, the bold, the rash, the magnificent, who hated anything secret and furtive, looked only once at her dear face, and agreed.

V

"YOU'RE late again, Miss Patterson," said Mr. Dunne.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Edith. "I'll really try not to again."

But she didn't look sorry. She sat down at her desk, flushed and a little out of breath, and, to Mr. Dunne's great displeasure, there was a smile hovering about her lips.

"Miss Patterson," said he, "I'm afraid this is once too often."

Edith looked up in alarm.

"But, you see—" she began, and stopped.

She couldn't explain to Mr. Dunne that this was a most pardonable lateness, and not at all likely to happen again. Going to the City Hall for a marriage license wouldn't occupy much of her time in the future. Thinking of this, she smiled again—and lost her job. Mr. Dunne didn't like people who smiled when they were late.

So it happened that just when she badly needed a smile she hadn't one. The wretched little imitation she gave to Hardy, an hour later, didn't deceive him for an instant. He stopped beside her desk—a thing he had never done before.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, and would not be put off.

No use to tell him that he shouldn't stand there and talk to her! He knew that very well, and he didn't care. A mighty rage filled him. Edith, his Edith, his own girl, to be discharged and humiliated like this!

"Get on your hat and jacket," he commanded, "and come on!"

"Joe! You mustn't—"

"Look here!" said he. "I won't have you here like this. If Dunne told you to go, then go now. Good Lord! Haven't you any pride?"

She was too wretched to be angry at him. She did get on her hat and jacket, and, in full view of every one, Hardy walked out of the office with her at three o'clock on a busy afternoon.

"We'll go to the flat," he said, "and talk it over."

They had a flat of their own. Hardy had insisted upon this.

"We'll take it now," he had said; "and

whenever we see anything especially good in the way of furniture, we'll buy it. Then, when I come back, we'll have a place of our own all ready for us."

It wasn't quite what they wanted, but Hardy had very little money just then, and their only time for house hunting was what they had been able to pilfer from their lunch hour; so they had taken the first one that seemed at all suitable. It consisted of three tiny rooms in a remodeled house west of Central Park.

They had already become inordinately fond of this future home. To be sure, there was nothing in it except a barrel containing a Limoges dinner set, which Hardy had bought from a shipment received at the office; but Edith had made a flying visit and measured the windows for curtains, and after that she could look upon the place as her own.

This afternoon, when Hardy opened the door with his latchkey, the place was obviously a *future* home. It was bare, bleak, and dusty, with slanting sun rays falling across the ill laid board floor of what was going to be the sitting room.

The door closed behind them, and there they were, alone, with plenty of time for talking now, and neither of them said one word. Hardy began walking about. His footsteps made a loud and somehow a melancholy sound. His voice in the empty little rooms was not at all his confident office voice, but boyish, and, to Edith, terribly touching.

She sat down on the barrel, struggling against her despair and misery, while he moved about in the kitchen, mocked by a gas stove with no gas in it, and water taps that gave forth no water. She knew how he felt; she knew what he would say.

" But I won't!" she thought. " I'll get another job. I won't let him take care of Aunt Bessie now. I won't! I won't! Not now, when he's just beginning."

If she were making resolves in the sitting room, so was Hardy in the kitchen. He hadn't been singled out by Mr. Plummer because of his gentleness and consideration. He had a remarkable future because he was remarkably persistent and clear-sighted about getting his own way, and Edith was no match for him.

" No!" said he. " No more jobs! We'll tell your aunt *now,* and we'll get married to-morrow, as we planned, and we'll move in here."

" We can't, Joe. We haven't any furniture, you know—"

" Then we'll get it."

" And Aunt Bessie—"

" We'll see Aunt Bessie now. Look here, little Edith! It's got to be this way. I couldn't have my wife running about looking for a job. I couldn't go away and leave you working in a strange office. It was bad enough in the old place. Look here, Edith, don't you think you can be happy with me? Don't you love me enough?"

" I love you too much, Joe! It's not fair to you. You'll—oh, Joe, you'll have to sell your stock, and Mr. Plummer—"

" Edith," he said, " I've been thinking lately—I don't know how to put it very well—but it seems to me that maybe it's a mistake to live so much in the future. Suppose there wasn't any future—for us? Suppose something happened to one of us? Edith, I can't stand thinking of that! Look here! Let's just live now, and not be afraid of what's going to happen. Let's start this thing"—he stopped for a moment—" with courage and confidence," he finished.

She put her hand on his cheek and turned his head so that she could look into his honest, steady eyes.

" Let's!" she said, with a very unsteady little smile. " I feel that way, too, Joe. We'll begin this minute, and unpack the china, just so that we'll—we'll feel at home!"

VI

HARDY turned his back upon Mr. Plummer, and looked out of the window. It was a cold, rainy day. The people far below on the street were hurrying by under umbrellas.

" In that case, Hardy," said Mr. Plummer, " I'm sorry, but—"

" Yes, sir," said Hardy.

He couldn't, at that moment, say anything more. Something had risen into his throat and silenced him. He would have liked to speak, to tell the man who had shown so kindly an interest in him that he regretted his hasty and violent words. He hadn't meant all that he said. He had come to tell Mr. Plummer that he wanted to sell his stock. He had listened, as patiently as he could, while his employer remonstrated with him. He had endured a pretty stiff lecture upon his recent slackness and lack of attention to work, because he knew he deserved it; but when Mr. Plummer undertook to warn him about "entangling" himself with that "young woman in the auditing department," all his genuine respect for his chief had vanished in an overwhelming anger. That "young woman" was his Edith!

He didn't like, now, to recall what he had said.

"I'm sorry, Hardy," said Mr. Plummer again. He was looking at the boy with an odd expression on his lined face, a look half respectful, half sorrowful. As a man, he liked Hardy the better for his outburst, but as a business man he deplored it.

"I wish you the best of luck, my boy," he said. "Refer to me at any time."

"Thank you, sir," said Hardy.

Off he went, with his words of apology unsaid, with five years of friendly interest unrewarded, and with his own heart like lead. He walked through the office for the last time, and into the corridor, leaving so much behind him.

Edith was waiting for him in the lobby.

"Oh, Joe!" she cried. "I found a place uptown where they promised to deliver the furniture this afternoon. Imagine! And I got the dearest material for curtains! I brought a sample to show you."

She was opening her hand bag, but he stopped her.

"No, don't," he said curtly. "Not just now."

Here she was, chattering about curtains, after all that had happened! He remembered how he had left her the evening before, after a horrible interview with her aunt. He remembered her pitiful attempts to soothe and comfort that hysterical old demon, and her anguish when she failed so utterly, and was told that if she married "that man" she would be cast off—except for the trifling communications necessary to continuing her support of the martyr.

"And I couldn't sleep for worrying about her!" he thought bitterly. "I thought she'd be ill, and look at her now—perfectly happy, talking about curtains!

"Come on!" he said aloud, and then stopped, with a frown. "Haven't you any umbrella?" he asked.

"I have one," she replied, "but not here. It wasn't raining when I started."

"Edith!" he said suddenly. "Don't you remember?"

How could he have imagined that she was happy, or that her mind was filled with thoughts of curtains? That small, gallant, smiling thing, so pale, so troubled, with the shadow of her suffering dark in her eyes!

"It's nearly twelve, Joe," she said, looking at her watch. "We haven't much time."

"Oh, yes, we have!" he told her. "We have any amount of time, for I'm never going back there."

"Joe!" she cried. "Oh, Joe! Oh, no, no! Don't tell me you've—"

He drew a long breath, and then looked down at her with a grin.

"You've got a young man with a remarkably uncertain future," he said. "Never mind—we'll start a new future. Anyhow, I shan't have to go to Europe now, and leave you."

"Oh, Joe! What have I done?"

"I did it myself," he said sturdily, "and I'm glad. Thank Heaven, we've got time, now, for a nice, peaceful wedding!"

YOUTH'S TRIUMPH

"The last song is sung," cried the old man,
  "And the last word is said!"
Then the upward fire of the dawn broke
  And the banners of morn overhead

Led on the youth of creation,
  And the sky that was gray turned gold,
And love grew as mighty as ever,
  And the heart of adventure as bold!

Youth climbed to the stars on new pinions;
  Youth waxed mighty and strong;
Youth bitted the thunder and rode it;
  Youth sang a new song!

Harry Kemp

Suspicion

THE STORY OF A FALSE ACCUSATION

By Reita Lambert

RICHARD SELLS sees little of his wife, who spends her time in quest of hectic pleasures with what she terms her "kennel of jazz hounds." When Della Sells sails for France with a party of her friends, her husband, disgusted with New York, seeks rest and quiet in the out-of-the-way village of Standish, close to the Connecticut shore of the Sound. Calling himself "Mr. Brown," he is taken in as a boarder by Peter Stayton, a retired skipper, whose daughter keeps house for him. Dorcas Stayton is a gentle, attractive girl, and Richard finds her companionship very pleasant.

One evening, when Peter has gone on an errand to New London, Richard and Dorcas go out in the girl's skiff. Their boat is stranded on a rocky flat by the falling tide, and they do not get home until three o'clock in the morning. This is reported to Peter, on his return, by old Rose Ruby, a neighbor who sometimes helps Dorcas with her housework. Furiously angry, the old skipper jumps to the worst possible conclusion, and decides that only by forcing the stranger to marry Dorcas can he wipe out the disgrace inflicted on his family. His certainty is increased by the fact that Richard announces that he must return to New York.

VIII

THE village lay in the ominous hush of the approaching storm. The elms about the common were motionless, their leaves drooping. It was as if the town held its breath, conserving its strength to combat the elemental furies that would soon be unleashed upon it.

Peter struck off across the common, returning with an automatic nod of his lowered head the jovial greetings that bombarded him. Down Maple Street he hurried, and up the steps of an ancient stone house affixed to an equally ancient church by an ivy-grown ligament.

"I want to see Mr. Beckwith, ma'am," he announced to the plump old housekeeper who beamed upon him from the doorway. "Jest tell him it's Pete Stayton who's come on a little matter of business—important business."

She led him into a dim parlor—a square, spacious, low-ceilinged room whose Colonial hauteur had been subject to the spasmodic improvements of the ambitious years until now its character was blended of half a dozen eras. The huge old fireplace was boarded up, and its mantel was nearly concealed by a pompous, round-bellied stove. Figured carpet stretched brightly over the wide floor boards; golden oak stared impudently at mellow mahogany. A bunch of dried cat-tails, tied with faded yellow ribbon, stood in one corner.

In spite of the room's architectural and decorative inconsistencies, Peter was subdued by its air of piety—by the bulging plush Bible, with its enormous gilt clasp, prominently placed on the center table, and by the faded print of "The Last Supper" hanging over the organ. In the serene face of the Christ he sought and appeared to find approval of his fervid plans, so that his eyes, when they met the minister's, had lost something of their maniacal light. They were steadier, but no less determined.

"Well, Pete, how are you? Sophie told me your business was important, and I said to myself, 'Well, have old Pete's sins been riding him too hard?'"

They clasped hands warmly. Mr. Beckwith was a small, withered man with a bristling, bustling manner that grew more marked with the years, as if to offer tangible proof of the superiority of spirit over matter. His scorn for his more or less secularized brethren, and for their growing congregations of admiring liberalists, was manifest in his sermons. He lashed and exhorted his parishioners with the inflexible rod of the Old Testament—and loved and

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comforted them with a heart as large and warm as his body was spare and chill. Sincerity, however, lent his pious bigotry a sort of dramatic majesty, and there was scarcely a service that did not see his little church packed to the doors.

He regarded Peter with a twinkle in his merry brown eyes, his hand pawing at his streaked beard, in anticipation of some peppery controversy, but his mirth found no reflection in that somber gaze.

"It ain't my sins that have brought me up here, parson," Peter explained quietly. "It's a—it's a weddin'."

"A wedding!" gushed the little parson. "A wedding! No! Not yours, Pete, after all these years? Don't tell me you've gone and—"

"No, no—ye know it ain't me!" Peter was trying desperately to rise to the minister's waggish mood. "It's Dorcas—my daughter."

"Dorcas! You don't say!" It was a cry of genuine delight. "Well, now, that is fine! So she's going to be married! No wonder you look as if you'd just buried your first mate at sea! It seems only yesterday she was running around here with her hair in pigtails — cute little rascal!" His eyes crinkled. "She'd have been a pretty nice girl if you hadn't brought her up such a little heathen, Pete. And now she's going to be married!"

"Yes," said Peter. "Now she's goin' to be married."

"Well, sit down, man. Sit down and tell me—who's the lucky man, and when is the wedding to be?"

Peter eased himself slowly into a plush-covered chair, spread his great, knobby hands on his knees, and bent forward.

"It—it's a city man's been stoppin' with us this summer. Likely ye've seen him around the village sometimes. And the weddin'—it's to-night."

"To-night?"

"To-night," Peter carefully repeated.

"But, man, why didn't you let me know before? When did they decide to get married? When did they get the license?"

"License!" repeated Peter, and again, with dawning alarm: "License! Why, they ain't got one. They—well, they jest decided to get married—jest this morning."

"Oh, well, then"—Mr. Beckwith thrust his hands deep into his pockets, swung one short leg over the other, and smiled genially upon his guest—"there won't be any wedding *this* night. Seems to me, Pete, you're in a blessed hurry to get rid of your only child. Fine paternal attitude, I must say! But it won't work."

"Won't work!" Peter swallowed hard, striving to preserve his fixed smile. "Ye mean ye won't marry 'em to-night?"

"How can I? They've got to have a license. What's more, they've got to have it four or five days before I can perform the ceremony. That's the law, and you know it, Pete."

The old man stared stolidly before him, checkmated by this unexpected obstacle, prodding latent strategic resources to overcome it without revealing his daughter's guilty secret.

"Well, mebbe I did know it," he admitted belligerently; "but I know, too, that there ain't hardly any law ye can't reef to meet a squall."

The little minister was frankly puzzled—puzzled as much by the unnatural solemnity of the old man as by this unreasonable exhibition of obstinacy. His good-humored smile did not falter, however.

"Of course, I know what young people are, God bless them! They're always in a hurry — especially when they're in love; but I guess they can wait a few days, all right."

"But they can't! They can't wait, parson." Peter's lips were twitching under the ragged mustache. "They got to be married to-night."

"But I've just told you, Pete—"

"I don't care what ye jest told me," he bellowed. "Don't go talkin' to me about the law! Where's the law, when it comes to some of these here hurry-up weddin's and deathbed marriages you're always hearin' about, when there warn't no time fer licenses?"

"But those are emergencies. In such cases, when there hasn't been time for proper preparation, it's different—in this State, anyhow. The minister takes the entire responsibility upon himself—"

"There! I told ye!" Peter's hand came thumping down on his knee. "There ain't hardly any law ye can't take a reef in, jest like I said!"

"But it's not regular, Pete. No minister cares to marry a young couple under those circumstances. It's too heavy a responsibility. If subsequent events prove that it was in any way unwise, *he* is responsible."

"Yes, I know!" The old man's tone was

wheedling now. He bent swiftly forward and laid a hand on the minister's knee. "Ye won't have nothin' to be sorry about after *this* weddin'," he went on. "Ye'll marry my girl to-night, license or no license, parson, won't ye?"

"I tell you I can't do it, Pete. I'm sorry."

"Pshaw!" scoffed Peter largely. "Course ye can do it!"

"Sorry, but they'll have to wait and get their license," repeated the minister firmly, though his smile still held. "If it were a case of emergency—"

"Ain't I been tellin' ye that that's jest what it is?"

"No, Pete. You've told me nothing of the sort."

"Well, I tell ye now, then!" roared Peter. When he saw shocked wonder replace the little parson's benignant smile, he resumed his wheedling tone, though his voice shook. "It ain't that I want 'em to get married like this. I don't want to lose my girl; but what ye goin' to do when a young one takes it into her head all of a sudden that she's goin' to get married, an' threatens to go off and have it done by some parson ye don't know? What with him leavin' to-morrow—"

"You mean the young man is going away?"

The minister was regarding Peter intently now, and a trifle sadly. The old fisherman nodded emphatically.

"An' she jest bound to go along," he confided, with every appearance of plaintive resignation.

"Can't he wait for a few days?"

Peter's sly glance noted the breach he had made in the minister's reluctance, and he slipped in another wedge.

"Wait? They won't do it, I tell ye. An' how do I know who's goin' to marry 'em, if they go off like this? What father wants his child traipsin' off to some strange place, an' gettin' married by some strange parson? I can't budge her, she's that set."

It was noble dissimulation. Surely no one could look more guileless, more injured and appealing, than old Peter Stayton hunched forward on the little plush chair and pleading the cause of a willful daughter; but the minister's penetrating gaze was not focused on the seamy old face of his importuning visitor. His was the business of souls, not of surfaces, however moving they might be; and Peter's soul was flying its signal of distress from the depths of his hunted little blue eyes.

"Why does the young man have to leave so suddenly?" asked the parson quietly.

"Some business in the city—somethin' pressin', it seems; an' if they ain't married to-night, well—but ye *will* do it fer me, won't ye? Ye can see there's no time fer a license an' all that. Ye know how these young people be. Ye said yourself they was always in a hurry." He was almost whining. "All ye'll need is a prayer book, parson. Dorcas bein' so plumb set on gettin' married, I want some one I know to do the job, see?"

If Mr. Beckwith saw more than the old man had intended him to see, it was not so much that Peter's dissembling was lacking in finesse as that the clergyman's sagacity had been sharpened by years of conscientious probings. His smile had gone now, and his eyes were grave.

"If the matter were urgent enough—" he began, but Peter swept down upon the words.

"It is, man! God knows I wouldn't ask it of ye if it—if I—well, if it warn't. I promise ye, ye won't be sorry. I want them young folks to be married to-night under my own roof, and I want ye to do the business. Ye'll never regret it—never!"

The room was dim with the false gray twilight of the hastening storm.

"But we're going to have a bad bit of weather to-night, Pete. Why not bring Dorcas and her young man up right away, then, before the storm breaks?"

But Peter Stayton shook his shaggy head stubbornly.

"Under my roof! If it storms, ye can get a jitney from Gilfrey's. I'll pay fer it —glad to. I—ye see, we sort of planned to have the weddin' down there, right after supper."

"Well, Pete," said the minister, after another moment of silence, "I'll do it. I'll come along down as soon as I've had my supper. Will that do?"

"That 'll do fine, parson!"

They appeared to be all the words Pete could find at the moment and he said them huskily.

The little minister followed him to the door. Up and down the wide street the leaves were beginning to whisper among themselves, as if warning one another of the impending tempest. Something of the gloomy apprehension that overlay the village was in the minister's brown eyes as he held out his hand to Peter and watched him start off down the path. Suddenly he called to him, and the old man turned.

"You forgot to tell me the young man's name, Pete."

"His name?" echoed Peter, and added, with a grin which he endeavored to make playful: "Oh, you'll hear his name all right enough, when the time comes!"

IX

He went swiftly on through the thickening gloom, passing other hurrying figures, who flung prophesies over their shoulders to the effect that it was "blowin' up like a good three-day sou'easter." A woman called to him from a yard, where she was working in silent haste to retrieve the rugs and cushions put out for an airing. Farther down the road another cautious housewife was tilting her porch chairs against the wall of the house. The wind was blowing in from the sea in fitful gusts which laid the beach grass flat and thumped loose blinds about crazily.

As Peter turned into the beach road, he caught sight of Rose Ruby, her head swathed in a fringed shawl, her skirts flapping above wrinkled shoe tops, standing before the window of her dilapidated shack and tying the blinds together with bits of dirty rag. He hurried forward, calling to her hoarsely, but she slunk quickly into the house and pulled the door to after her.

Cursing under his breath, he pounded up the path and raised his voice.

"Open that door, ye rattlin' bag of bones, or I'll kick it in!"

The answer came back plaintively:

"What fer? What d'you want?"

"I want to speak with ye, that's what. Open her up, and quick, too!"

She presented him with the sharp tip of her nose squeezed through the smallest possible aperture, but he could see her eyes gleaming in the semidarkness behind her.

"Well, then, what you got to say, callin' me names?"

"Ain't a patch on what I'll call ye if ye don't mind what I'm tellin' ye, witch! I want ye to come down to my house, see? Watch fer the parson—Mr. Beckwith—an' when ye see him go by, step quick an' come after, or I'll come an' get ye!"

"But I can't. It's goin' to storm."

"An' a storm's nothin' to what 'll happen to ye if ye don't come, woman," announced Peter thunderously. "You're goin' to come along and finish up the job ye started this mornin'. You're goin' to see my girl married to-night. Surely"—with elaborate sarcasm—"ye won't stop away from a weddin' fer a little thing like rain, will ye?"

"A weddin'!" she squealed, and now the whole of her yellow grin was in evidence. "She goin' to marry him—after all? A weddin', hey?"

"Ye heard me!" boomed Peter. The hands that he had placed behind his back for safety were clasping and unclasping convulsively. "Jest watch out fer the parson goin' by, an', when ye see him, hustle along."

"Oh, I'll hustle, all right," she chuckled. "I'll be there—don't you worry!"

He left her chattering and cackling there on the wind-blown doorstep, and hurried on. He was smiling grimly when he turned into his own yard. What better bridesmaid could he have found than the woman who had already fouled the bride's good name? Oh, he was not without a sense of values—though he would not have thus defined his motives—when he added Rose Ruby as a final fitting touch to the wedding he had planned!

He found Dorcas hauling a great square of tarpaulin up from the cellar. She tossed it down to scold him spiritedly.

"Father! Where have you been? Now you hurry and fasten this over the Dorcas, or you'll break your back bailing her out after the storm."

"I'll do it, girl—I'll do it right off," he said, quietly enough, and gathered up the stuff. "Where's our star boarder, Dorie?"

"Upstairs, packing, I think."

"Packin', eh?" Pete echoed, moving off. "Packin', is he?"

When the blinds were all fastened securely, and the captive launch protected from the storm, he followed her inside.

"Jest get supper a bit early to-night, girl," he commanded. "I don't recollect eatin' overmuch fer dinner, an' I'm pretty hungry."

"Well, then, of course, the great bear shall have his food," she replied, smiling, and went in search of her indispensable apron.

He watched her moving about from a far corner of the kitchen, where he had ensconced himself with a clumsy old Colt across his knees and a can of oil beside him on the floor. The barrel of the old weapon was already beginning to give forth a blue sheen under the vigorous application of the oil-soaked rag in his hand.

"It always makes me nervous to see you fussing with that old thing," she told him, laying the silver beside the plates, and looking across at him with a line of anxiety between her eyes.

Peter's slow smile widened.

"Needn't make ye nervous, Dorie. Have to keep her oiled up, if she's goin' to be fit fer any use."

"But you know we never use the awful old thing."

"We-ell," he drawled, "ye never *can* tell when a gun 'll come in handy!"

The girl went back to her work, but presently he spoke again, still in his careless drawl:

"So we're goin' to lose our star boarder, eh, Dorie?"

She was breaking eggs for an omelet, her back toward him, but she nodded.

"Yes," she said. "He's going."

"Too bad!" commented Peter lazily. "Too bad, ain't it?" he added, as she continued silent.

"Yes," she repeated.

"He seemed a nice sort of feller, Mr. Brown did. Nice and smooth his manner always was."

She was beating the eggs busily, and did not reply. A few enormous raindrops were leaping against the windows, like frightened emissaries of the marching gale behind them. The scarred old horse-chestnut tree, standing guard over the Dorcas, was tossing its half dead arms in terror beneath the gusty onslaught of wind.

"Like as not you're pleased to see him go," hazarded Peter nonchalantly, "what with the cookin' and the extra work."

Now he was rewarded. Her voice came, clear and indignant:

"He has never made any extra work, daddy. I never minded it; and as to the cooking, he's lots easier to please than you." She flashed him a reproachful glance. "You never heard me complain, did you?"

"No," admitted Peter grimly, and with one eye closed, so that he could the better regard the beautiful polish he had produced on the barrel of the old Colt. "No, I never heard ye complain, Dorie—I never did."

Moving about the tower room with the dumb, uncertain haste of one who responds to instinct rather than to coherent thought, Richard was making his preparations for leaving Standish. His wardrobe trunk stood wide; his clothes lay heaped upon the bed and trailed across the chairs.

For hours he had been painstakingly struggling with the task before him, but his long fingers had become unaccountably clumsy. They seemed detached, something quite apart from the rest of him, insensible to the sharp agony in his heart. More than once he had stopped to regard them with dull impatience, or to curse softly at their impotence.

Then, too, he was forever finding himself, with trunk and bags forgotten, standing at the windows and peering through the mounting dusk across the water, toward the little rocky protuberance where he had lost his blithe ecstasy in discovering his love. It was a restless sea now, lashing itself into a foaming frenzy. He could picture the little island, engulfed, scourged by the insensate fury of the waves, even as his own relentless Nemesis was scourging him.

Again and again he prodded himself to activity, only to find himself, after a few moments of futile exertion, hunched dismally in the little Queen Anne chair, or peering once more across the churning water. He could hear the girl's voice assuring him that it had been her fault as much as his. He could see her face again as it had looked in the gray dawn—pale, wide-eyed, a little puzzled, with her rumpled hair wisping about her temples, her lips half parted in a smile.

Ah, her splendid self-possession had not withstood the emotional siege of that night's experience! Had she guessed? Could Richard have taken her into his arms and kissed the puzzled wonder from her eyes and love into them?

The thought shook him back once more to realities. Again he set diligently to work, to the tune of a dreary chant within him. He was going away—away from Dorcas, the woman he loved!

It was because he loved her that he was leaving. He was aware of a dumb wonder at this, and said it over carefully. He was leaving the woman he loved because he loved her.

Della might turn that into one of her neat paradoxes. Richard thought with what avidity his wife's jazz hounds would pounce upon it. There was enough humor in the tale to supply them with a full evening's entertainment. In it they would find all their pet bromides—a rural setting, a humble country girl, ginghams, naïveté, love in the moonlight, sacrifices. How they would rock with mirth!

His thoughts swerved again to the trunk that he should even now be packing. He was leaving. Would Dorcas think his abrupt departure odd? No—blithe child that she was, how should she suspect that he loved her?

It occurred to him that he might have found a palliative in speech. How sweet her sympathy would have been!

The thought gave birth to a sudden impulse, and he hurried to the desk. He would write to her. Surely there would be no harm in that! Surely, after their long weeks of companionship, he owed her some explanation of his sudden leave-taking!

He knew it to be a pitifully weak defense, but he picked up his pen and began to write feverishly.

DORCAS, MY DARLING:

For the first and last time I am going to call you this. I don't know why I should write to you, unless it is that I am too small and selfish to deny myself the solace of putting on paper the things I so long to say to you.

First of all I want to tell you that out of all the years that have gone, and all those that are still to come, these weeks with you mark the fullest measure of my happiness. They are the only happy weeks that I have known since my childhood. I came to you a lonely and unhappy man, with the taste of bitter disillusion in my mouth. I leave you, still lonely, still unhappy, but with the memory of you tucked away, a little torchlight in my heart that will serve to brighten the dark years ahead of me.

Dorcas, most beautiful of names—*I love you!* Some day you will know the full import of those three sublime words. Thank God, you have still to learn! Thank God, my own belated awakening has not affected you. That is why I am leaving like this, so that there will be no danger of your mistaking the blessed sympathy I know you will feel for me, for something of which I am unworthy—for something that I am not free to claim.

You took me into your home and gave me your friendship, which is the greatest treasure I have ever possessed. I have been happy here—happier, I believe, than any living man. Until last night I did not discover—blind fool that I was—that the source of my happiness was yourself; but last night I knew that I loved you—I who forfeited my right to love any woman as I love you, ten years ago, when I linked my destiny with another, to whom I am still bound by my marriage vows, if by nothing more.

For these ten years I have kept faith with myself and with the woman I married. I shall still keep faith, for how else should I dare to cherish the memory of you? You have lightened my burden—a burden whose weight I pray God you may never know. I leave you with your image in my heart, and I must keep my heart clean, so that it will be a worthy shrine for that blessed memory.

You are everything that I have been seeking in life these many years—noble, beautiful, and pure. I am at your feet, and there I shall remain in spirit; but since that spirit dwells in flesh, I am going away from you.

I want you. I would gladly forfeit all the years that may still be my portion if I might claim you for my own; but the fates have decreed otherwise, and I must go, knowing that one day the gift of love will be yours, that one day some doubly blessed mortal will possess the priceless treasure I could not claim. Life is niggardly, but, if she can grant such a boon, I pray that the future may bring you all that you deserve. It is much to ask, but I do ask it for you.

Think of me sometimes, Dorcas—think of the blundering wretch who loved you, who would have died for you if the sacrifice would have availed you, and who perhaps atoned in part for his mistakes by leaving you. I love you! I love you! I love you! Farewell!

RICHARD.

His cheeks were burning and his heart was pounding heavily when he scrawled his name at the foot of the closely written page. Shaken out of his innate reserve, perhaps for the first time in his life, he dared not trust himself to read what he had written, but folded and slipped it into an envelope, wrote her name across the face, and propped the letter against the inkstand.

He was fumbling once more in the half packed trunk when her voice came up the stair well to him.

"Supper, Mr. Brown!"

Mr. Brown! Last night she had called him Richard, and had endowed the name with a pulsant significance it had not possessed before. He had a sudden revulsion against his fictitious identity. He had put a lie into her mouth!

He shook himself peremptorily. There was need for self-control now, for the casual cordiality of the summer boarder about to take polite leave of his temporary host.

In the kitchen, the adjustable lamp slung above the table was lighted and lowered to within a foot of the white cloth. All the homelike comfort of the big room seemed to have been drawn within that small, gay circle of light. It gleamed on the dishes and the shining silver, touched the old man's rugged features with a gentle glow, and brought a latent sheen of bronze into the girl's smooth head.

"Well," Richard said lightly, "it looks to me like one of these spectacular storms we read about."

"It's dirty weather, an' looks mighty

like a sou'easter," returned old Peter, diligently apportioning the omelet. "A sou'easter's likely to last three or four days. My father always said a sou'easter never quit—it jest wore itself out."

The girl, spooning little heaps of browned potatoes, did not raise her eyes, but she said pleasantly:

"Did you finish your packing all right? Dreadful job, isn't it?"

"No, I didn't," replied Richard. "I'm not very good at that sort of thing, I'm afraid—too clumsy."

"Why not let Dorcas help ye some?" Peter broke in eagerly. "Women are better when it comes to that sort of thing. Should have asked her before."

"Oh, no—that would be an imposition!"

"Imposition, your granny!" scoffed Peter genially. "Course she'll help—won't you, Dorie? After supper ye can go up and help Mr. Brown with his things, can't ye, girl? Why don't ye say something?"

Her throat and cheeks were crimson, and she did not raise her eyes when she spoke, but Peter's glowering gaze did not release her until she had promised.

"Of course — I'll be glad to help — of course," she said.

"That's more like it!" approved Peter, and heaved a great sigh. "Of course she'll help—and she's a good packer, Dorie is!"

Then the heavy silence that had overlain the noon meal settled down upon them once more. There was a good deal of clatter from Peter's knife and fork, but at the end of twenty minutes, when the girl rose to clear the plates away for the peaches and cake that were to follow the golden omelet, she looked disapprovingly at her father's plate.

"I thought you said you were hungry, daddy!" she said. "But none of us seem to have eaten much supper," she added with a nervous laugh.

"A storm," drawled Peter, with a sharp glance at his brooding guest, "most generally *does* take my appetite away. Don't it affect you that way, Mr. Brown?"

"Eh? Oh, yes," agreed Richard absently. "I shouldn't wonder."

"Now, Dorie," urged the old man, when they rose, and the girl began to gather up the dishes, "don't go botherin' about them things. Light Mr. Brown's lamp there, an' run upstairs an' give him a hand with his packin'."

She moved obediently across to the lamp shelf. Richard found himself wondering at the old man's repeated and unusual use of his pseudonym; yet, even as he wondered, his irritation was swept away on a wave of guilty ecstasy. Dorcas was coming up to the tower room, and they would be alone together for a few exquisite moments. She would be near him, her fingers would touch his things, he might even—if he could bring it about casually enough—touch her hand. Further treasures, these, for his album of memory!

He took the lamp from her and followed her up the stairs, heedless of the lusty reverberation throughout the wide halls, deaf to the melancholy ululations in the chimneys. When he set the lamp down on the bureau, she regarded the cluttered room with genuine housewifely dismay.

"My gracious! You *are* in a mess, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I am," he admitted a bit unsteadily. His pulses had quickened at sight of her there, regarding his bungled belongings with such a proprietary air. "I told you that I'm no packer."

"So I see," she said, smiling.

She set busily to work gathering up the tossed shirts and folding the coats. Over an armful of garments she threw him a question:

"We don't want to pack the things you're going to wear back. Have you a traveling suit laid aside?"

"Oh, yes—that is, I don't know."

She shook her head disapprovingly, and he smiled sheepishly back at her. She was still holding the bundle of clothes to her breast. They made a clumsy bundle in her slender arms, and he stepped forward to take them from her, when she spoke again.

"I'm sorry you're leaving us, Mr. Brown."

"Oh, don't!" His cry was involuntary. "Don't call me that, Dorcas! Don't you remember last night? You called me—Richard!"

"That's right, girl! Last night you called him Richard, which I expect is his front name, all right; but the rest of it ain't Brown!"

It was Peter's characteristic drawl, and the unexpected sound of it brought them whirling about in startled surprise.

The old man's tall, angular figure filled the doorway. His little buried blue eyes caught the thin stream of light from the lamp, and their malicious gleam matched the blue sheen of the revolver barrel dangling from his fingers. His left hand was spread, shoulder high, against the door jamb. Save that he was rocking slightly, as if in rhythm with the rocking winds outside, all the abandoned calm of the raging elements seemed to have gathered itself into that quiet figure.

From the center of the cluttered room the other man and the girl regarded him, half dazed by his abrupt appearance, their eyes wavering confusedly between the curiously intent face and the casually held revolver.

The girl was the first to shake off the spell he had lain upon them, and to seek refuge in commonplace words.

“ Now, daddy, what are you doing, trotting that evil-looking old gun around the house and—and saying such funny things?”

Peter did not move, but a slow, malignant grin stretched his mouth, and he raised the Colt gradually until its muzzle covered Richard's heart.

“ Saying funny things, am I?” he repeated sibilantly. “ Ask *him* if it's funny! Ask him!”

The girl turned her puzzled gaze to Richard, and found that his eyes had gone lifeless and his face paper white. He essayed a feeble smile.

“ No,” he said, “ it isn't funny. Once I found some humor in the situation, but now—no, it isn't funny.”

“ Ye see!” gloated Peter. “ Ye see, *he* don't think it's funny!”

The gaze of the two men held across the girl—a gaze fraught with some galvanic force beyond her comprehension. She took a step toward her father.

“ Why, daddy—”

“ Stay off, girl, stay off!” he commanded, without taking his eyes from Richard's face. “ I think *Mr. Brown* an' me sort of understand each other!”

“ Daddy dear, what is it?” Anxiety for him had swept away all other emotions. She whirled on Richard. “ Something has happened! Can't you see? Father's not well, he—”

“ She thinks I've gone crazy, don't she now, *Mr. Brown?*” broke in Peter suavely. “ But we know different, don't we? Ye know I ain't mad, don't ye—not mad the way she thinks?”

“ Yes,” said Richard dully, for the ingenuous simplicity of the girl was not his. He knew now that guilt had lain heavily upon him—guilt born of that bleak moment on the rocks the night before—the guilt of one who has sinned in desire, if not in deed. Somehow the tale of their artless escapade had reached the old man, and he believed—what he believed was only too evident from the savage glare of his little eyes and the poised pistol in his hand. “ Yes, I know that you're not mad, Mr. Stayton, but you are mistaken in—”

“ Mistaken!” boomed Peter, his self-restraint slipping. “ Mistaken, ye say! That shows well enough that ye know why I've come up here an' brought this along!” He patted the barrel of the weapon significantly. “ Oh, you're a slick one, all right! Goin' away, warn't ye? Thought to get off with a whole skin to ye, eh? Didn't care what become of the girl ye'd ruined?”

“ Father! Father!”

The girl sprang forward, but he whirled on her with a savage growl.

“ Shut up, you! I'm doin' the talkin' now!”

“ But, daddy, you don't un—”

“ Ye goin' to tell me that ye warn't out all night with him? That ye didn't come sneakin' into the sluice this mornin' at three o'clock? That ye didn't get back home till nigh on to dawn? Is that what you're goin' to try and tell me?”

“ No, no—we did! I mean the tide was low, and we couldn't—”

“ High when ye went out, warn't it? Ye could 'a' put in right up to midnight, if ye'd seen fit, but did ye? Did ye?”

His voice had risen until now its volume throbbed and reverberated in the little room, and became an integral part of the tumult all about them. Richard spoke for the girl, his voice sharply edged.

“ Mr. Stayton, you must listen to me,” he said. “ There is nothing to reproach your daughter for. I can easily explain—”

“ Listen to ye!” broke in the old man. “ What stock do ye think I'd put in anything ye'd say? And who's reproaching the girl? Oh, you're a smooth liar, *Mr. Brown,* I'll grant ye that! All of ye is jest one lie, from your name clean through ye!” He loomed threateningly over them, but the hand that held the pistol was steady. “ I took ye into my house on faith, like I'd 'a' picked ye up at sea an' give ye safe, free passage into harbor; an' what did ye do? Ye robbed me—ye took somethin' ye can't never give back!”

“ No, father, he—”

"Shut up, girl! I'm at the wheel now!" She shrank away from him, from the terrible passion that was burning him—the passion that only calm men can know. "Do ye think she can ever hold her head up amongst decent folks any more? Do ye think *I* can? Did ye think ye could come up here an' dirty the name of Stayton, an' get off scot-free? You're the one that's mad, if ye think that!"

"I don't, but—"

"Shut up, or I'll blow ye clean through to the hell that's waitin' fer ye! Nobody'd blame me fer that. Folks 'd only thank me fer it!"

Richard made another attempt to speak, but the muzzle of the Colt was prodding into his ribs. The girl had sunk into the little Queen Anne chair, marble pale to her lips, the knuckles of her hands showing white against the chair arms.

"I'd sooner kill ye than not, but you're more useful to me alive than dead right now."

"Mr. Stayton, you must listen—"

"Listen, is it? Listen!" he bellowed. "Ain't I been listenin' all day to folks draggin' my girl's name through the mud? Won't I be listenin' to the same thing all the rest of my days—hearin' folks call my girl a wanton?"

"By God, you shall hear—"

But Richard's hoarse cry was cut short by the old man's savage roar.

"Say another word, an' I'll shoot ye where ye stand—hear? Think I want to listen to any more of your lies? Warn't ye smooth and sweet, an' then the minute my back was turned didn't ye—didn't ye rob me?"

It was as if Peter had begun to fear his own terrible passion. He backed slowly away toward the door, his eyes and pistol still focused on Richard, his chest heaving.

"God fergive the murder in my heart—but I ain't goin' to kill ye. That would let ye off too easy. I'm goin' to make ye a present, instead. I'm goin' to give ye the girl ye wronged!"

X

THE old tower quivered under the tremendous impact of the storm, and around the balcony a myriad unleashed fiends scurried, whimpering and clamoring at the closed blinds. Now that the boom of Peter's voice had ceased, these voices of the tempest rushed into the silence.

At the old man's last words, the drawn dismay on Richard's face had given place to a dazed disbelief. For a moment he stood staring woodenly before him. The girl's eyes were fixed in wide horror upon her father. Then Richard leaped forward.

"My God, man, you can't do that! You—"

"No? Can't I?" Peter's former rage was a puerile thing compared to the maniacal frenzy with which he met the other man's horrified cry. "No? Can't I? It's as good as done. Don't ferget I told ye I'd jest as soon shoot ye as not; so stand back, young feller, and keep your mouth shut! Do ye think I been idle all day a mournin' my loss? Not I! The parson's downstairs this minute, likely, a brushin' up his service. Didn't I know that would be the last thing ye'd want? A slick, rich city feller like you to marry my girl! Never give it a thought, did ye? But *I* did! I know the kind ye are. The city's full of 'em. I must 'a' been blind not to see it right off, but I trusted ye. The devil ain't marked ye on the outside, yet, but I found ye out in time. Ye've ruined my girl's name—now ye'll give her another. Even if it ain't much, it 'll sound better 'n the one you stole—in other people's ears, anyhow."

"For God's sake, Mr. Stayton—"

But Peter lunged at him.

"One more word an' I'll put a hole through your carcass! I'll kill the girl, too. A Stayton—ye may not believe it, but a Stayton would prefer death to disgrace any time. Oh, I know what ye'd say, an' I know the girl would take your part. That's a woman's way—that's the Stayton way. Ye've both had plenty of time to talk—now *I'll* do the talkin'. The parson's waitin', see?"

The pistol was making a slow arc between them.

"There's goin' to be a weddin' all fair and proper—leastwise, that's what the parson thinks. I lied to him, but I expect the Lord 'll fergive me that lie, seein' it was in a good cause!"

"Father! Father!"

The girl had half risen, her voice strengthened by desperation, but Peter broke off her cry.

"Unless ye want to meet your Maker with a stain on your soul, girl, ye'll keep quiet! Ye'll both keep quiet now"—he chuckled triumphantly—"quiet as little lambs, an' take your medicine. If ye don't, if either of ye speak one word that's like to make the parson think it ain't all regular and proper, I'll kill ye both, so help me God!"

Once more silence held them—a crowded, clamorous silence, as if the forces of nature had been coerced into providing a fitting background for the rudimentary drama being staged in the quivering tower atop the old white house.

"And now," suggested the old man with grim humor, "s'pose ye jest hand out them papers an' things ye said ye had along! I got a prejudice to the name of Brown, somehow. My girl 'll be satisfied with the name ye was christened by."

The girl sprang quickly to her feet, her gaze clinging to the blue barrel of the Colt as it followed her across the room to Richard's side.

"That's right! Get beside him!" sneered Peter.

His words released her from the spell in which the weapon had held her. She raised her eyes to Richard's face, and slowly he brought his haggard gaze to meet hers. It was a valiant little face she lifted to him, drained of its color, its buoyant vivacity, its endearing sparkle, but calm in the security of her own innocence.

"Your name isn't Brown, Richard?"

All her concern seemed to have centered itself in this disclosure.

"No," he said gently.

"What is it?"

"No need to ask him!" cried Peter. "You'll find it there among those books and papers."

But the girl's eyes clung questioningly to Richard's, and seemed to be drawing the anguish of his wretched soul down, down into their cool, gray depths. He heard himself saying evenly:

"My name is Richard Sells, Dorcas."

She shrank against him when Peter's free hand reached past them to the table, on which were strewn some loose papers, with a check book among them. The old man's fingers fumbled swiftly in the heap. Then, with a triumphant grunt, he backed again to the door and raised his voice, his eyes and the pistol still on that silent pair.

Richard was aware that Peter had called the clergyman, but this seemed, for the moment, of less importance than the fact that the girl had believed him before her father had verified his name. He found a curious triumph in this—found, too, that his incoherent thoughts had met and grappled with the grotesque situation with a sort of detached and forensic logic.

He saw that he was helpless to prevent the marriage. He knew that if he blurted out the truth now, as he had been trying to do, the old man in his wrath was likely to shoot them both, and to go to his grave with a sense of duty well performed. Of their harmless excursion the night before, he evidently believed the worst. If the man whom Peter thought guilty of betraying his daughter were to confess that he was not free, the disclosure would only color the supposed offense more darkly. It would probably snuff out the last ember of the man's waning reason.

Thus Richard's thoughts, scurrying around and around like frantic mice in a revolving cage. His mind settled wearily into a lethargic huddle, only dimly aware of the curious activity going on about him.

"Remember!" hissed Peter from the doorway.

He stood aside then, and Richard was conscious of the stocky figure of the little minister, and, close at the latter's heels, the withered and gangling Rose Ruby. It was as if he were an attentive spectator at some preposterous play, toward which he had resolved to be politely uncritical. He was aware of voices. The clergyman's was warm and deep—an incongruously big voice for such a small man, Richard decided dispassionately.

"An' this is the groom, parson," Peter was saying with an elaborate assumption of heartiness. "Mr. Richard Sells, of New York—Parson Beckwith."

Richard felt his hand taken into a small, plump grasp, knew—surprisingly—that he was making a fitting rejoinder to the introduction, even while a vagrant sense of humor took cognizance of Rose Ruby's festive frock. It was green, with the snug bodice and puffed sleeves of the late nineties. Its revealing outlines made her look like some overgrown insect—a gigantic grasshopper, that was it!

A pressure upon his arm shook him oddly. The girl was looking up into his face, and an elusive word was floating just outside his consciousness. Ring! Some one had mentioned a ring. They were demanding a ring of him, but Peter already had it. It lay on the old man's outspread palm—a wide gold band.

"It was her mother's," he announced quietly. "She took it off the night she died—first time it had been off since we got married. She said, almost with her last breath, that she wanted Dorcas, here, to have it when *she* got married. Here it is!"

There was further talk. Richard realized dully that the clergyman was delivering a homily. He was very earnest and solemn, almost as if he were talking over a corpse. Richard caught the words "faith" and "purity" and "sin," but the speaker's voice seemed to weave itself into the cacophony raging outside the windows.

Rose Ruby had moved up beside Peter now, and they stood just behind the clergyman, who was spreading a little book in his hands—a small black prayer book. The thin ray of light from the lamp picked out the angular bridge of Rose Ruby's nose, and seemed to lend it a separate vivacity. It seemed to Richard to be gloating there, all by itself.

A trickle of water had skulked in beneath the window frame, and had started to crawl down the wall and across the matting. Then, as if the rich portent of the words had the power to still even the orgiastic rites outside, a lull fell over the tower room, and the minister's voice rose clear and full.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this company—"

It was the marriage ceremony. These were the words that made Richard, in addition to everything else, a bigamist!

"Show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

Why didn't some one speak? *He* would speak—but then, of course, he dared not. All those myriad fiends outside, who had suspended their wild antics long enough to hear the service launched, raised their voices in shrill protest—bigamist, bigamist! But the clergyman's words droned on above them, calm and imperturbable. His voice was lifted in a question now, and Richard was aware that the old man had slipped his hand suggestively into his pocket. He heard his own voice saying:

"I will!"

He knew a swift sense of relief when the minister shifted his earnest scrutiny to the girl. After all, he told himself, there was less harm in an empty ceremony than in murder. He had not hurt the girl. Tomorrow the old man would be sane, and would listen to their tale calmly. After that, Richard would be gone from Standish. All this was but a melodramatic bit of play acting staged by an infuriated old bigot. It was utterly unreal.

But the hand that was placed in his was real! A cold, moist little hand it was, but there was a steadiness in it that was magically reassuring.

He brought his dazed eyes to focus on the girl's face, and the sight of it swept his brain clear of its befuddling fever. This was his gift to her. How willingly he would have submitted himself to Peter's alternative, how gladly have welcomed the precious oblivion of death! But the girl's life should not be forfeit.

He echoed the minister's words evenly, secure in the rightness of his purpose, gathering strength from the thought that his crime was for her sake—for the woman he loved.

Her voice was raised now, making the immemorial vow—"for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and obey."

How brave she was! With what palpitant life she endowed the words! She knew nothing of love, nothing of life, but her inherent valor would one day meet both as superbly as she was meeting this crisis. As her clear voice rose and fell in the little room, it occurred to Richard that she could have spoken the phrases no more devoutly had they been uttered in all sincerity; yet she was only playing the preposterous rôle her father had thrust upon her.

His thoughts were invaded by the memory of Della parroting that same solemn promise in the vast, blossom-decked church, fidgeting restlessly in her tulle and satin.

"I thought I should *die* if I couldn't laugh!" was her comment afterward.

And now Richard was slipping another ring on another woman's hand—a wide, bulky affair, this one was, and too large for the competent little fingers that he held. He was murmuring automatically:

"With this ring I thee wed, with all my worldly goods I thee endow."

Mockery! He shivered; but better mockery than undeserved oblivion for the gallant little creature at his side. The clergyman's prayer wavered above them as they knelt, but Richard shut out the words.

He heard, instead, the rioting of rain and wind against the windows, and watched the thin stream of water crawling wetly across the matting toward the trailing absurdity of Rose Ruby's frock. His knees were stiff when he rose, and he thought dully that the prayer had been a long one.

"Well, well, Dorcas, my dear!" the minister was saying genially. "I'm not too old to claim a parson's privilege and kiss the bride, am I?"

Dorcas gave him her cheek, and now the taut constraint that had held them was shattered by leaden jovialities, by a forced levity, monstrous and hollow. Richard marveled at the girl's magnificent reserve as the minister filled in the marriage certificate to the accompaniment of his incessant pleasantries.

Rose Ruby, intimidated by the presence of the minister and the solemnity of the occasion, contented herself with grinning yellowly upon them. Peter was working as diligently to disperse the wedding party as he had labored to assemble it, urged on by the dangerous pallor of the girl and by Richard's chill taciturnity.

"All right, Rose Ruby—your name's on here as witness. Run along now. Mebbe the parson 'll drop ye at your house on his way uptown—eh, parson?"

"With all the pleasure in the world," concurred the clergyman. He turned with a fine simulation of heartiness to the pair standing rigidly where he had left them. "Well, young people, you'll have a wedding night to look back on! This isn't a storm one forgets in a hurry. You're leaving for the city to-morrow, your dad tells me, Dorcas."

"Richard has to get back," the girl said quietly.

"Just so, just so." He was gathering up his prayer book and slipping the certificate into its envelope, all with ostentatious energy. "A man has to keep his nose pretty close to the grindstone these days, if he's to keep a wife, eh?"

His chuckle spared Richard a reply. Once more his hand was taken into the minister's plump clasp.

"Ye'll find your way out if I don't come down with ye—eh, parson?" interrupted Peter loudly. "Sorry there ain't no weddin' feast with this weddin', but there warn't no time fer frills an' furbelows, with these young people in such a hurry."

Rose Ruby had sidled surreptitiously over to Dorcas, her face thrust forward eagerly; and now her hoarse whisper filled the room.

"Well, since he *has* married ye," she advised sibilantly, "make him take ye to Coney Island on your weddin' trip. It's a grand—"

But Peter's voice boomed forth, clipping short the eloquent description that might have followed.

"Come along, Rose Ruby! The parson's leavin'!"

She skulked swiftly to the door, her eyes avoiding the murderous malignity of Peter's regard, her head still wagging knowingly at the girl.

The clergyman bustled out, to the tune of his own studiously preserved cheerfulness. They heard his voice raised in lively conversation with the cackling old woman as they descended the stairs.

Peter stood motionless at the door until the sounds grew faint. Then he closed it softly, and turned a savage, triumphant face to his daughter.

XI

Dorcas was standing rigidly beside the old chest of drawers, the fingers of her left hand curled against the palm, her eyes fixed with breathless intensity upon the wedding band.

"Well, Dorcas!"

She raised her head slowly at the words. Richard shook himself out of his enveloping lethargy, and took a step forward, but she drew him back with a firm pressure on his arm. The old man smiled contemptuously at the swift pantomime.

"Or perhaps I should say Mrs. Sells," he said.

Still she did not speak, though for a moment color flamed in her face—flamed, and faded almost at once. The pressure on his arm still admonished Richard to silence.

"I pretended I had to stop up here long enough to give ye my blessin'!" hissed Peter. "Blessin'!"

He took a step toward them, eliminating Richard from his vision by the simple expedient of turning a hunched shoulder to him.

"What I stopped up here to say to ye was this, girl—he's set ye right with the world now. You're married to him in the eyes of God and man, but that don't mean he's fit to have ye. What he done to ye proved that!"

Once more Richard took a step forward and opened his lips to speak, but the bitter words were flooding from the old man's twisted mouth.

"I'm a Christian man, and the Lord's word is law with me; but even the Lord wouldn't ask a woman to live with a man she despised, an' if ye don't despise him after what he done to ye, ye're no kin of mine! He's saved your good name—that's all *we* care about. Now show him the door! Fling him overboard like ye would bilge water, girl!"

The same elemental forces that were at work outside were shaking the old man's big frame and thickening his voice; but the girl did not wince. She gazed back at him, her chin lifted and thrust slightly forward. When he paused, she lifted her hands, with the palms outward, as if to warn him away from her. It was a gesture of ineffable contempt.

"You—you dare?" she breathed. "You who married us at the point of that evil gun—you dare to tell me to throw *him* out?"

The old man stepped back, as if her repulsion had been physically enforced. A surprise that was almost ludicrous swept over his face.

"Dare?" he thundered. "Dare, when ye know he wronged ye?"

"Yes, *dare!*" she echoed. "Wronged me? How dared you think it? How dared you judge us on the evidence of a half crazy old woman? What right had you to condemn me unheard?"

Richard, who had stepped forward as the girl advanced upon her father, and who stood now, unconsciously, in an attitude of protection at her side, was aware that he was witnessing the birth of Dorcas's maturity, the death of her merry, irresponsible girlhood. Maturity cloaked the slender figure; maturity was in the steady, inexorable voice. Now she would speak, and, when she spoke, he doubted if even the furious old man would disbelieve her.

As he waited for the words that would release them both from this mesh of suspicion, and would place the wedding ceremony in the limbo of life's grotesqueries, he had a poignant sense of bereavement; yet why should he feel bereft of something he had never possessed?

"I saw it with my own eyes!" the old man was saying doggedly, his fury fanned by this sudden insurrection. "I saw the skiff up to the sluice! Ye don't deny ye came in on the tide? Ye don't deny ye were out till dawn, or nigh on to dawn, with him?"

"No, I don't deny it. I wouldn't have denied it if you had asked me, as any just father would have done; but you didn't ask me. You preferred to listen to the evil tongue of a wicked old woman. That was all you needed to sentence me—you who call yourself a Christian!"

"Ye *were* out all night!"

"And I might have been out all night again and again, and still never have been the thing you thought me! Had you no faith in your own daughter?"

"Yes!" he bellowed. "But I ain't got no faith in smooth city liars! I don't know him!"

"You knew *me!* Do you think I am so lacking in pride, so weak, that I would forfeit my self-respect as easily as that?" She stepped back, holding her arms out before her, as if to place a tangible barricade between them. "But you *did* think it! You judged me without a hearing. How many times you have picked up some poor creature adrift at sea, and fed and nursed him, and brought him safely into port—and then bragged about it! Oh, you would do that for a stranger, but when you believed your own daughter was in distress, all you could think of was your pride!"

"Ye sullied my name," he roared. "Ye've ruined me."

"You see, you were thinking of yourself—not of me. If you had thought of me, you would surely have given me a chance to explain."

"I was thinkin' of ye!"

"No, you were thinking only of yourself. Do you think my mother would have believed an evil thing like that of me? Do you?"

"Thank God she ain't here to see it!" cried Peter. He raised his fist and shook it above his head. "She'd 'a' died of shame fer ye! Ye were out all night with this—this—"

"We were!" she broke in. "We went out on the rocks, to watch the moon rise, and it was so—so beautiful"—her voice broke, but she kept on bravely—"it was so beautiful that we just stayed on and talked, and forgot that there were foul minds and cruel suspicions in the world. It seemed as if there were only peace and beauty and purity. Then we saw that the tide had gone out, and our boat was beached. It took us a long time to get her off, and when we came back we had to row into the sluice." Her voice died away, and her shoulders lifted in a contemptuous shrug. "There is the horrible story. You might have had it before, if you had taken the trouble to ask for it. You knew that I wouldn't lie to you!"

The flickering light from the small lamp and the screaming of the wind outside lent vitality to the silence that followed. The old man's fingers were clawing at his mustache, and his eyes were fixed on the girl's white face with a venom that had gathered greater virulence as her story progressed. It was almost as if they had forgotten Richard's presence. Now, seeing that there was no credence in the old man's face, he stepped forward; but even as he spoke, he was conscious that his words sounded puny, ineffectual.

"I could have explained it, Mr. Stayton," he said, as Peter shifted his malevolent gaze to meet the other man's eyes. "If you had called *me* to account, I could have told you how the thing occurred. It was entirely my fault that we stayed so late. I'm not very well versed in the matter of tides and so on."

"She was!"

"But I kept her. I wouldn't have done so if I had thought there was any harm in it."

"There was no harm in it!" defended the girl swiftly. "What harm could there be? I was with Richard! There was nothing in it but happiness and peace; but you have robbed us of those. You've made it seem slimy and horrible with your ugly, suspicious thoughts!"

"And who wouldn't be suspicious?" thundered the old man. "The whole town's talkin'! This house has stood here nigh on to two hundred years, an' there ain't nobody dared raise a voice ag'in' it until now!"

"Pride!" accused the girl scathingly. "You would sacrifice your own daughter to your pride!"

"Who says I sacrificed ye?" he demanded. "I saved ye! I married ye to the skunk that ruined ye — *he'd* never have done it! But I ain't fergot ye're my daughter still. Now that he's made ye an honorable woman, so that ye can hold up ye're head agin, kick him out! Heave him overboard, like I told ye to!"

Richard opened his lips resolutely, stung to speech, intent on making the announcement that would show the enraged old man what a ghastly farce he had engaged in; but the girl's firm clasp on his arm robbed him of initiative. Her voice rang out again clearly.

"You say that — you, when you have just made me this man's wife? Only an hour ago you thought marriage sacred enough to purify a terrible sin. You brought me up to think of marriage as eternal." Her voice was athrob, her eyes flashing. "You heard me make my vows. You heard me promise to live with this man until death do us part."

"*I* didn't say ye had to live with—"

"Dorcas, I must—"

The abortive sentences of the two men were simultaneous, but her voice crested them.

"And do you think I break my vows so easily? Do you think I should have let you marry me to Richard, if I had not intended to be truly his wife? I would have died first!"

Her head was flung up regally. Without taking her eyes from her father's rabid gaze, she stepped, a living bulwark, between Richard and the infuriated Peter.

"Did you hear me promise to love, honor and obey him? And after *that* do you think I would send him away — my husband?"

She had stepped closer to Richard. He could feel her quivering against him. He knew that her eyes had left her father's face and were raised for a fleeting instant to him.

"Where my husband goes, I go. I am his wife, and whom God has joined together let no man put asunder!"

XII

The words hung resonantly in the little room, and were taken up by the polyphony outside, of which they became the theme, until the whole was woven into a mighty fugue. The girl's exalted face held the gaze of the two men, and the confession on Richard's lips withered into a jumble of futile words.

The old man, startled for an instant out of his choleric fury, started back, and for the first time a chilly trickle of doubt cut its way through his assurance. The girl's radiance clothed her like an immaculate vestment. Could a wanton look like that?

But even as his misgivings invaded his fevered brain, his fury redoubled to meet them.

"So that's the way ye feel about it, is it?" he sneered. "Well, mebbe ye think ye can pull the wool over my eyes, but it's too late. Ye got some pride left in ye, anyway!"

"Yes," she countered calmly. "Yes, I have enough pride to resent any more of your blasphemy. Leave us, please!"

"Oh, I'm goin'!" He was moving backward toward the door. "Don't think I want to stay, do ye? But mebbe ye'll see things different in the mornin'! Mebbe ye'll repent of your bargain; an' if ye do, I'll not hold this ag'in' ye! I've done my best!"

"You have!" she broke in. "You've done your best to bring us to your own level, to torture and shame and humiliate us; but if you were wiser, you'd see how you have failed!"

"Failed, have I?" he sneered. "I made him marry ye, didn't I?"

"Yes!" she said. "Yes — and I shall live all my life with that in mind. I shall live only to atone for that—to try and make up to my husband for that injustice."

"We-ell," he drawled derisively, "it's as good a way to get around the shoals as any; an' it looks to me like ye've got a job. He don't seem unwillin' fer ye to take the tiller!"

Once more Richard came forward, but the girl pressed him back.

"Don't speak, Richard—don't speak!"

"No fear of him speakin' now! He's got his dose! If ye take my advice, ye'll heave him overboard an' give the sharks a bellyful!"

"You dare!" she cried. "You dare! Go! Do you hear me?—*go!*"

Involuntarily the old man shrank back under the violence of the command. He felt awkwardly for the knob, and flung the door wide. His face was a quivering, distorted mask of fury, but there was a ghastly suspicion in his hot eyes that belied the sneer on his lips.

"Oh, I'll go, an' leave ye to wallow in your sin! Since ye made your wicked bed, lie on it!"

He pounded down the stairs and through the dim halls. The kitchen door stood open, pouring a feeble stream of light on the figured strip of carpet that led to the front door. He stepped into the kitchen, slamming the door behind him. Then for a wild, befuddled moment he stood staring across the room.

Bunched in a low rocker near the stove, the folds of her musty green gown pouring over the floor and imbuing her face and gleaming eyes with a sickly hue, sat Rose Ruby. The bridge of her crooked nose was twitching, like that of a senile rabbit, above her yellow grin.

With a whispered curse, Peter strode across to her. Her smile widened as he approached.

"I thought ye went home with the parson!" he said.

"Well, I didn't. I thought mebbe ye might want me to stay an' cook breakfast fer ye in the mornin'." She cackled suggestively. "Like as not ye won't get none if ye wait fer the bride to cook it fer you, eh?"

He swooped down upon her, dragged her to her feet, and thrust his face close to hers.

"Do ye know I could kill ye?" he hissed. "Do ye know I *will* kill ye, if ye don't tell me the truth? Ye *did* see em, didn't ye? Ye did see 'em come in together, nigh on to dawn, didn't ye?"

Her cracked yellow grin did not alter, and she wagged her ragged head with a vehemence that threatened to sever it from her scrawny neck.

"Nigh on to dawn it was, so help me God!" she whispered triumphantly. "Didn't I tell ye so?"

"Yes, ye told me, but be ye certain?"

"I saw 'em, I tell ye! I saw 'em with my very own eyes! Arm and arm they come in!"

He released her, conviction flooding back reassuringly. Muttering unintelligibly, he stalked the length of the kitchen, and then came to a pause before the inflated old woman.

"Go to bed! Ye can stop here to-night. Ye're right—I'll be needin' ye to-morrow. Get to bed!" he commanded.

He watched her as, with a final triumphant grin, she sidled out of the room.

Once alone, he abandoned himself utterly to the madness that was creeping upon him. Like some vicious caged monster he paced the room, back and forth, back and forth. He had been right—they *had* been out all night. Well, he had married them; and now she was up there—his girl and her seducer.

He stifled a frenzied oath at the thought. His girl—his baby—and she had turned against him when he had only been trying to save her! Now she was up there with the man who had wronged her. She had put her own father away from her and given herself to a stranger. They were up there together!

Half crazed, he flung the outer door open. He started back from the terrific onslaught of wind and rain that assailed him, and then strode out across the flooded path and across the lawn, which sucked at his feet and oozed great rushes of slush into his shoes.

The wind beat fiercely against him. Rain poured over his bared head and ran in rivulets down his face. The gaunt limbs of the old horse-chestnut tree were moaning and swaying like some stark skeleton borne aloft by the wind, and the roar of the waves against the shore was deafening; but he was unconscious of the tumult, unconscious of the downpour that flooded his face and stung his eyes as he raised them to the lookout tower, from whose closed blinds feeble pencils of light were seeping. They were up there together—his girl and the stranger who had robbed him!

As Peter looked, he raised both arms, with his fists knotted into gnarled stubs, and his hoarse voice lifted in a terrible apostrophe:

"Damn ye! Damn ye! May your soul go to the hell that's a waitin' fer it!"

When the door closed on the old man, Richard stood gazing blindly at it, while the massed misery of a decade crowded in upon him. A benumbing paralysis, born of his own futility, was upon him as he turned to the girl—to the tribunal of those clear, confident eyes.

She faced him with her head high, and with color flaming in her cheeks. Humbly he took her two outstretched hands. They stood thus for a moment, looking into each other's eyes, while the world fell away from them, leaving them on the altar stairs of some shining Arcadia. Her voice reached him, soft, ineffably tender:

"Richard! You see it's all right! In spite of everything, it *is* all right!"

She said it with exultant assurance. It was all right, in spite of everything!

Mechanically his brain recorded the words, "in spite of everything;" but she had yet to learn about Della.

"Didn't you feel it, too, Richard, when the minister began to speak? Before that it was horrible; and then suddenly—it was when you took my hand—I knew that it was all right, for I looked up at you and I *saw!*"

"You saw?" he echoed dully.

"That you — that you loved me," she faltered. "I could read it in your eyes; and when I saw it there, I knew that I loved you!"

She loved him! The phrase so softly spoken filled the little room with pulsant life. The rioting elements outside took it up and blazoned it forth on the trumpet tongues of the wind. It sang itself into his consciousness, rousing him from his stupor, drowning out the foreboding voices already there, setting itself to the rhythm of his leaping pulses. She loved him!

He felt her swaying against him, and knew that he had taken her into his arms, that he was holding her close, that her head was on his breast and his lips against her hair. She loved him—she had said it; and he found himself echoing her.

"Dorcas, Dorcas, I love you, I love you!"

"I knew, Richard, I knew!"

Ecstasy flooded back, washing prudence and reason before it.

"When did you know?" he demanded.

"I thought I knew only to-night," she said awesomely, "but now it seems as if I had known always—always!"

"That is because I have loved you always, Dorcas. Ever since there has been love in the world I have been loving you!"

"Yes, Richard, I think real love seems like that."

"And you love *me?*"

"I do—I love you. That is why I said that, in spite of all this horror, it is all right. We were meant to belong to each other—and what does it matter how it came about?"

"*We were meant to belong to each other!*" The words roused him from the ecstatic trance into which he had slipped. His arms fell away from her in an agony of self-condemnation. What had he done? What had he said? He had told her that he loved her when he had intended to tell her about Della. Why?

Ah, he remembered now—she had said she loved him! How could he cap that divine statement with his own sordid story? Yet he must tell her. Her love for him made it all the more imperative. She believed herself to be his wife!

He forced his stricken gaze to her, and found her eyes full of anxiety. Would the words never come?

"Dorcas, Dorcas, what have I done—when I would rather have died than make you unhappy?"

She caught his hands and cuddled them against her breast.

"But we're going to be happy together, Richard!"

"You don't know—"

"I know that we love each other. I know that love can survive even this."

"But I have subjected you to all this—to a barbarous marriage that never should have been—"

"No, no!" she protested. "It was I—my father; but, even so, perhaps it was meant to be this way. We might never have found each other. After all"—she raised a troubled smile to him—"you were going away from me, Richard!"

"Yes, yes—I was going away."

"Did you know that you loved me?"

"Yes, Dorcas, I knew."

"And you were leaving—in spite of that?"

"Because of it!"

"You were leaving me because you loved me! Why, dear?"

An agonized moan escaped him.

"Because I'm not worthy of you! I'm not fit to touch your blessed little shoe!"

"Don't you think I should be the judge of that?"

He drew a hand across his forehead, and it came away moist.

"How can you judge me, or anything about me, when you don't know me? Oh, my God, can't you *see?*"

Her wide eyes were upon him, and, as he spoke, the bewildered distress in their depths gave way to a slow terror. With a moan, he sank into the little Queen Anne chair and dropped his face in his cupped hands. The windows were shaking in demoniacal frenzy, and the draft from them whipped the pale flame of the lamp into gusty rebellion.

The girl stood where he had left her, her horrified gaze on that bent head. Her hands went slowly to her throat. He had been going away—yet he loved her!

Her eyes went to the trunk, roamed aimlessly about the cluttered room, and came at last to his desk, with its jumble of books and papers, and, propped against the inkstand, the white envelope with the scrawl across its face.

It held her gaze and lured her across to it. It seemed as if she knew that it bore her name even before she groped for it with fingers that had gone suddenly dead. She fumbled desperately with the sealed flap before it would yield the closely written pages.

Once, as she stood there reading what he had written, Richard raised his head and stared haggardly across at her; but, save for the unearthly pallor of her skin, the girl gave no sign of the havoc those tragic words were making of her valorous composure.

He was dragged back from the abysmal despair into which he had sunk by her touch upon his hair. He jerked his head up wildly. Only her eyes were alive in the still marble of her face, but they were living wells of commingled horror and compassion. He sprang to his feet and away from her, plunging against the trunk.

"You see! You see! Oh, my God, Dorcas, don't hate me!"

"Hate you?" she whispered incredulously. "Hate you, dear? It is you who should hate my father. Oh, Richard, my *dear!*"

Her tone astounded him. Perhaps she had not understood.

"Don't you see what I have done—what this thing has done to you? I am a bigamist—do you realize that? Do you realize what people will say of you *now?* And I have done it to you—I!"

Self-restraint had left him. Bleak, pinched, tragic, he stared down at her, shaken out of his virile strength into a cringing supplicant.

With a little cry of protest, she went to him, all the newly awakened forces of her womanhood rising to meet the sudden demand upon them. She took his hands. At her touch he crumbled utterly, and dropped to his knees before her.

"Ah, Dorcas, my darling, my darling, forgive me! I never meant to hurt you, God knows!"

"Of course not!"

She had his head in her arms, had drawn it against her, and he could feel her fingers against his temples and the warm throb of her body against his cheek.

"And now you know—you know!"

"Yes," she said, "I know. I might have

known before, but somehow I never thought of—just that."

"It seemed to me, when I found you, that I had been groping blindly for you all my life—and even before that, back somewhere in some other world. It was as if I had found something that I had lost so long ago that I had forgotten I had lost it." The words tumbled forth incoherently. "And now it's as if I had been unfaithful to you, Dorcas—unfaithful—"

"No, no," she soothed. "How could you know?"

"I should have known that you were somewhere in the world waiting for me. I should have looked for you before!" He stopped suddenly, and gazed up at her in a transport of agony. "Oh, Dorcas, if you could say you didn't love me, if I could go away feeling that I hadn't hurt you, my darling!"

"*You* haven't hurt me," she said softly, and added, with a strange, wondering ardor: "I do love you, Richard—I do love you, dear!"

"Thank God! No, I don't mean that!"

He fell back against her once more, and her arms went about his shoulders with a yearning tenderness.

"After all, dear," she said, after a long moment, "your telling me this, and my knowing it, doesn't alter the fact that we love each other."

"Ah, my darling, I would be better dead!"

"No!" she protested, and her voice had taken on a challenging ring. "No, I don't believe that. I don't believe things like this happen because we will them. Father thinks he brought this about, but I don't believe that, either. I believe there is something behind this that none of us can see—the same power that put love into my heart. Perhaps it is that you need me—that you need me even more than if we could belong to each other."

A sharp crash cut into the solemn words as one of the small window panes broke loose from its frame and came crashing to the floor. The wind rushed through the blinds, loosing a small tornado among the papers on the desk.

Richard leaped to his feet, but the girl was at the window before him. She stood with her back against the shattered pane, stopping the rush of wind and rain with her slender body, like a living fortification between him and the frustrated fury of the elements. For a moment she remained there before she moved away and began stuffing his raincoat into the ragged hole.

When she turned to him again, her face was radiant with a sort of divine elation. It was as if they had both sensed the symbolism in that impulsive maternal gesture. His knees were shaking. She laid a firm hand on his arm, and drew him gently toward the couch.

"Come, dear!"

He made a feeble protest, knowing as he made it how puerile and ineffectual he had become beneath the soothing magic of her compassion and understanding. With gently urgent eyes and hands she softly forced his head down upon the pillow. He captured her hands and drew them against his face.

"Dorcas, Dorcas, what can I say?"

"Nothing—unless you tell me that you love me."

"I love you, I love you! I am a monster, and you are a saint! I love you dearly, but what can I do? What are we going to do?"

"I don't know yet, dear. Try not to think about the future."

"I am a bigamist!"

"You are mine!" she cried. "I know I shouldn't feel that way if it were wrong. We know in our hearts that in the sight of God we are man and wife. Even if we can never belong to each other on earth, my love is yours forever. You need it—you need me. We need each other. I am going to take care of you."

She had dropped down beside him, her head close to his. Outside, the tumultuous wind had spent itself, and was dying into a low moan. The blissful quiescence that had succeeded Richard's despair took possession of him again.

There was magic in the lax fingers he was holding against his face—a strange legerdemain that blotted out the past, obscured the future, and left him suspended somewhere between, in the impregnable fortress of the girl's tenderness. His fingers tightened around hers, and the girl, meeting the almost frantic appeal in his eyes, gave him her calm, serene smile.

Like some helpless victim of the storm, he had been tossed at her feet, buffeted and bruised and torn by life, and she had loved him. Surely there was some agency in this that was not mortal! Surely he had not been sent to her that she might fling him back into the bleak depths from which he had come!

The thought lent her strength, lit a faint beacon of hope in her brooding eyes, and banished the dark shadow that lay just beyond the dawn and over the dark, inscrutable future. To-night she must cherish him, must forget everything save that he was prostrated, and that she must have courage for them both.

"We must try to have faith, Richard," she whispered.

He moved her hands to his lips and kissed them reverently.

"My wedding ring, dear!" she reminded him softly.

He laid his lips reverently on the wide gold band.

XIII

About the time when New England was hauling forth her protective tarpaulins and fastening her blinds against the oncoming storm, some three thousand miles away, a low-slung blue roadster purred lazily along the road that falls away from Quimper to the sand dunes of the Breton coast. Past ancient plaster houses, chipped and scarred by the years, it rolled, drawing the curious glances of peasants at work in the fields, rousing sleeping dogs, who barked their protest against anything as modern as a motor invading their quiet seclusion.

The woman in the car turned, with a smile, to her companion.

"You'd think the natives had never seen a car before," she said.

"Or a beautiful woman," rejoined her companion promptly. "It's very likely that out here in this backwash they see the former a darned sight oftener than the latter; so let 'em get an eyeful, lovey!"

She twinkled up at him, snuggling down more comfortably in the low seat, and tapping his sleeve lightly with a slender gloved finger.

"You never miss an opportunity, do you, Hal, my dear?"

"Alas, yes!" he grinned. "I've missed you, these—how many years?"

She chuckled derisively.

"You *are* greedy! Here I am beside you! Here, metaphorically speaking, I have been this long time. What more would you have?"

He turned to her swiftly, easing the car into a slow crawl.

"You!" he said. "*All* of you, furtive little devil that you are—furtive, elusive, always just out of reach!"

She looked down quizzically at the hand he had placed about her shoulders.

"Out of reach?"

"Yes, even like this!" He tightened his hold of her almost fiercely. "Don't stall, Della! You know damned well what I mean! You're here—"

"Very much so, it appears!"

"But where do you keep the real you—the essence? Wrapped up in a thousand inhibitions!"

She bristled at that.

"Inhibitions! I don't own one."

"Well, then, where are your emotions?"

"In cold storage, Hal, old thing!"

"Another name for caution," he scoffed.

"Exactly," she agreed; "but not the kind of caution you probably think. I'm afraid you credit me with sentiments I don't possess."

"I'm beginning to think you don't possess any, my dear!"

She lifted an impudently smiling face to meet his avid glare.

"Why think at all, Hal? It really isn't being done, you know."

"You're a little she-devil, Dell," he told her amiably. "If you are human—if you do possess emotions, you keep them tucked in beneath that admirable shell of yours, like a hard-shelled turtle."

"Well, turtles bite if you poke 'em," she warned. "You'd better watch where you're driving, or I shall be running around with all my little red brothers and sisters—though, if I'm a turtle, how can I be a little devil as well?"

"You're both!" he countered, and swerved the car back to the center of the road.

She snapped open a thin silver case and extracted a cigarette.

"Stop a minute and let me get a light, will you?"

Obediently he drew over to the side of the road and stopped the car near a cluster of poplar trees. He held a match to her cigarette and watched the lazy cloud of smoke issue from her red lips.

"I suppose it's your husband," he ruminated sourly, after a moment.

"You suppose what's my husband?"

"Whatever it is that keeps you—"

"Impregnable?" she supplied archly.

"H-m—yes."

"My dear Hal, how delightfully naïve!

I'm as much out of Dicky's reach as yours. You mustn't attribute my fidelity to such a worthy motive."

"Then, by God—"

"Now, Hal, don't get heroic! It's too wearing."

"You've kept me dangling for a long time, Della."

"Which is the answer—I dangle—you dangle. That, my dear, is the only successful way to philander. You owe me a debt of gratitude for preserving your youth."

He flung out his hands in mock despair.

"Epigrams!"

"Subtleties," she corrected. "Don't you see, when you cease to dangle, you just naturally fall, and you get all messed up in emotions. That is the inevitable result of injudicious philandering — an emotional orgy, from which the parties of the first and second part emerge sated, battered, and bitter. That is what I would avoid. It's too aging, too unsatisfactory. Let us continue to dangle!"

His cynical absorption in her words had given place to a restless irritability. He sent a swift glance up and down the quiet road before he drew her roughly to him and found her smiling mouth with his lips. When he released her, his lips and eyes hot, he found her cool insolence unchanged.

"No use, Hal! If you refuse to dangle, you'll have to find another affinity."

"I'm damned if I will! You're not going to evade me this time! What do you think I trotted three thousand miles across the Atlantic for?"

She shrugged.

"I don't know — to see that sunset, perhaps."

She pointed ahead where the road traced a sinuous course between placid fields toward the distant sand dunes along the shore. Above it the sun hung blandly, pouring an iridescent flood of color on the undulating hills and tiny plaster houses.

"You see," she observed lazily, "how pleasant and inarduous a thing it is to look at a sunset; and yet all that beauty has been the cause of countless scientists' wrinkles, because they insisted upon prodding and prying to see what makes it beautiful. In other words, they weren't willing to dangle, so they got themselves all messed up in refractions and parallaxes and things."

"I don't give a damn for the sun! It's you that I—"

"But don't you see the analogy? You're not satisfied just to have me like this. You want to stir me up and dissect me, and I refuse to be either stirred up or dissected!"

"You can refuse all you like. You can't get away from me now!"

"What will you use—force?"

"No—tenderness."

"How bourgeois!"

"You've never been in love!"

"I told you I refuse to be stirred up."

He took her roughly by the shoulders, his heavy, handsome face crimson.

"It isn't going to do you a bit of good to refuse. Now that I know your scruples are mere vanity, I'm damned if I observe your danger signals any longer!"

"Then don't cry if you get hurt."

"Della, you're a fool," he said. "You're a fascinating, pig-headed little fool, and you're drying up like an undernourished spring!" An impatient frown drew itself between her languid eyes, but he hurried recklessly on. "Here we are, alone together, three thousand miles away from everybody, and what do you give me? Words! You think you're not inhibited, but you are. You're a vain little prig, and all these carefully smothered emotions of yours are going to turn and rend you some day, while love—"

"Who's talking about love?"

"I am! I love you, and you know it!"

"I know you entertain a mild, emotional sentiment for me."

"My God, you call it mild! I've been aching, burning for you this long time." She could feel his hot breath against her cheek. "Do you think I'm going to continue to dangle, as you call it, when I've got you here in my arms, when I know that underneath that metallic shell of yours you're warm — *warm?* Don't you know that just over the hill there lies ecstasy for us both?"

"And wrinkles," she supplemented, with a strained little grin.

"No!" he denied. "Even if there were, isn't it worth a few wrinkles?"

"No!"

"You're a coward—a prude!"

"I'm not, and you know it!"

"You are," he insisted savagely, luring her with his eyes and lips. "Come with me, Della! Come with me to the end of the world—to days and nights of ecstasy!"

"No, Hal."

"You will!" he said hoarsely. "You

can't resist it, Della. What are you made of, anyway?"

"Sugar and spice and everything nice," she chanted, but her breath was coming in short gasps.

"I believe it!" he gloated. "I don't believe there's a molecule of warm, red blood in your veins! If there is, you'll come with me!"

Her sardonic smile had fixed itself on her lips, but her eyes were blazing.

"Look!" he cried. "Look down there, where the road turns to the sea! There's an inn hanging over the dunes over there. From its windows you can see an eternity of blue water—blue in the morning, with the sun on it, and at night sprinkled with magic by the moon. Think of us there, little prude! Let me teach you what it means to love and be loved!"

"Ah, you're not playing fair with me!" she whispered. "You're poetizing!"

"I'm talking the language of love," he said ardently. "Look, the sun is pointing the way! Come, Della, where we shall be alone!"

"And then?" she breathed.

"And then," he echoed, irritated at being shot so far beyond his target, "then more life, more love! We shall have had our hour!"

There was no breeze, and the heat of the late August afternoon was sultry and close. The body of the little roadster seemed to have captured and held the warm rays of the sun, wrapping its occupants in an enervating cloak. Della's eyes were hot now, and the rouge on her cheeks faded against the flush beneath it. He bent over her, laid his lips swiftly on hers, withdrew them as swiftly, and threw out his clutch.

"Where are we going?" she demanded.

"Ah!" he gloated. "A pretty pronoun, my darling! I've just told you where we are going—there!" He pointed ahead. "To the end of the world—together, little prude!"

"You know that isn't true!"

"I must have proof, then!"

"You shall have it!"

He thrust out his chin and leaned forward, as if invoking the power of the little car to follow his own leaping spirits. Her lips still burning from his kiss, she leaned back inertly against the seat.

"But step on it, Hal!" she admonished softly. "My barriers are down, but you must hurry before I change my mind and put them up again!"

"Right-o, darling! We're off!"

They shot ahead down the precariously winding road, past tranquil fields and sleeping cottages, past placid herds of sheep and families of astounded goats, who loped frantically for shelter from that meteoric apparition. The rushing air had a tang of salt in it, and the sinking sun was ahead of them.

"If I could just keep that glare out of my eyes, damn it!" he cursed.

Only a moment later, a Breton fisherman, dragging his nets up the beach after his day's haul, jerked abruptly upright, and, with a muttered invocation to his favorite saint, crossed himself, as a wild blue monster came hurtling over the steep dunes a few hundred feet above him—came crashing down close to the placidly lapping waves, where it settled into a tangled heap of blue and gleaming nickel half buried in the sand.

The fisherman's cry summoned others, who came running toward the ominously quiescent pile, crossing themselves as they ran, and babbling incoherently. They huddled together not too near the jumbled mass, their white lips moving in soundless apostrophes to their saints. One man among them, braver than the rest, stepped closer, to inspect the gruesome object. He came back quickly, his face gray, his cap dangling from limp fingers.

"Henri has gone for the doctor," announced some one.

The man who had looked closely at the quivering blue thing shook his head.

"Even the priest would be too late to help them. Some one had better go to the *maire*."

A few of them hurried off in search of help, while others grouped themselves against the sand dunes, to listen in morbid absorption to the fisherman who had witnessed the accident.

"It came over so—*mon Dieu,* as if it were falling out of the heavens themselves! I was hauling in my nets when I heard it—a great roar—"

As he talked, the sun, like a sleepy, bloodshot eye, disappeared beneath the lid of the horizon, and the rising tide crawled avidly up, to pull and suck at the inert mass lying on the sand.

(*To be continued in the May number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

The Reclamation of Jack Birmingham

HOW A CLERGYMAN LIED AND A WOMAN TOLD THE TRUTH

By Lily A. Long

JACK BIRMINGHAM, as a young fellow, was the leader of one of the wildest gangs of street hoodlums in San Francisco, in the bygone days of that golden city. His mother, who was a thin and pathetic widow living upon an almost invisible pension, repeatedly told him that he was breaking her heart. It is to be hoped, in charity, that he doubted the accuracy of her diagnosis, for he never modified his conduct in consequence.

"You wouldn't believe," she would say plaintively to any chance listener, "that the Birminghams were God-fearing people back East, and pillars of the church, and that Jack's grandfather Casler was a judge of the Supreme Court of the State—*more* than respectable. You wouldn't believe it —I know that!"

When you saw handsome, daredevil Jack Birmingham rollicking down the street, his arms about the shoulders of two other young ruffians, you might have found it difficult to accept that more than respectable ancestry if you did not also remember the handsome, daredevil Jack Birmingham of the intermediate generation, who had drummed his way through four years of the Civil War with a hard-drinking regiment of Kentucky volunteers, and whose habits, formed under the frightful pressure of that environment, had later had their part in reconciling his thin and pathetic widow to the exigencies of the tiny pension. Perhaps the reckless and now forgotten father might have been less perplexed than the granddaughter of Judge Casler was, in accounting for the regrettable tendency on the part of the present bearer of his name to prefer the lively society of the water front to clean-collar picnics.

On the water front Jack had a golden reputation. Not only could he drink longer than any one else without losing his equilibrium, but he could hit quicker and harder, he could swear more fearsomely, and he could outwit the police more adroitly. His luck at cards was so phenomenal as to mark him the special ward of the blind goddess. In short, he was a hero in that melodramatic margin of a great city where honors go to the most vivid personality, even though it be the most lawless.

In only three particulars would his qualifications have met the requirements of the more conventional world. Beyond question he was handsome, beyond question he was courageous, and always he was a speaker of the bald truth—the balder the better.

For cowardice and lying he had the arrogant intolerance of the strong, who have never had occasion to study the life-saving virtue of evasiveness. When it is well known that a man has both the ability and the inclination to knock down any one who looks at him askance, what need has he of the protective art of lying?

Moreover, to an extent somewhat astonishing, Jack forced his own code upon the gang that rendered him feudal service. They might cozen the rest of the world to their hearts' content, for all he cared, but to him they had to give the incriminating truth or be cast into the outer darkness of his unforgiving contempt.

Then Jack Birmingham got married—and this is where the story really begins. He married a shy, blue-eyed little girl, with fluffy flaxen hair, whose name was Florence, but who was predestined to be known as Flossie. She regarded Jack with awestruck adoration, and would no more have ventured to challenge any opinion he might express than she would have questioned the Ten Commandments.

As for her own opinions, it never occurred to Jack that she had any. She was merely the sweetest, prettiest little girl he had ever seen, and he wanted to keep her all to himself. So he acquired the legal right to call her by his own name, and he put her into a little house on which he paid the rent, and he watched her pour his coffee, or brush out her fluffy hair, or speak severely to the milkman, with never failing delight.

She was better than a movie. She was also more expensive; and to meet the needs of the new situation Jack went into business. Not by the door of any mere clerkship! The dull routine of a store or an office would have been intolerable to his adventurous spirit. Besides, he knew a more profitable line.

He wheedled a friendly saloon keeper into advancing a sum which enabled him to buy the controlling share in a fishing smack. He had the pick of the men of the water front for his crew, and unsuspected stores of real knowledge in regard to the business of fishing in the background of his brain. It was exciting work, and close work, and hard work, but in two years' time his debt was paid, and business was running so profitably that Jack could afford to relax his attention.

All through those two years he had not once been drunk. This was not because of any effort at self-restraint. He simply had given the matter no thought. The hard, close work had in itself supplied all the excitement he needed, and he had been away from his old associates. But there was not an atom of "reform" in the changed situation, and one day, when a former companion jeered at him for a Y. M. C. A. convert, a mollycoddle under the thumb of his wife, Jack promptly challenged the fellow to a drinking contest, glass for glass, till one or the other should not be able to crook his elbow.

To his astonishment and his unspeakable disgust, he was worsted in the contest before it was fairly begun, and by a man whose prowess he had heretofore treated with friendly ridicule. His two years of abstinence and hard work had built into his body millions of new cells, which were taken by surprise by the alcoholic onset, and were utterly unprepared to withstand the enemy. Jack was furious, and plunged into a spree such as he had never known before.

II

UNFORTUNATELY, Jack's business was prospering so automatically, at this time, that he could afford to forget it. Unfortunately, too, Flossie, who for two years had been given to understand that her wishes were of the greatest importance to her husband, undertook to put that pleasant theory to a test. She began with reproaches, sank to tears, rose to pleading, and finally could only stand off watching in silent dismay as she saw the great engine of Jack's will running wild.

That deliberate plunge into dissipation had snapped some control which, in the wild years of his youth, had never failed to keep him from the lowest depths. Perhaps the taunt about his wife's thumb had aroused an evil pride in him. Perhaps he resented the loss of that awe-struck admiration to which he had come to think himself entitled. Two years is quite long enough to establish the fact that a wife is not really a fairy held in captivity, but it is by no means long enough to justify her in substituting reproaches, or tears, or silent disapproval, for the incense to which she has made a man accustomed.

At any rate, Flossie found that she had no influence whatsoever in this strange mood which had taken possession of Jack. So, as women have done from time immemorial, she turned to the church for help.

There had recently come into the Birminghams' neighborhood a frail and rather shy young clergyman, who thought to set the power of the spirit over against the world, the flesh, and the devil, as these are seen on the water front. Undoubtedly the spirit may be trusted to conquer in the long run, whatever the odds, but the Rev. Mr. Cotton was not of that order of muscular Christianity which frequently in fiction, and occasionally in fact, has compelled the respect of the devil by superior skill in the use of his own weapons. He knew nothing of the gentle art of boxing, he had never wrestled except in prayer, and he would not have known how to get the drop on a man, even if he could have imagined himself wishing to do such a thing. He was young, and embarrassedly conscious of that fact.

When Mr. Cotton realized that Flossie

was urging him to undertake to show Jack Birmingham the error of his ways, the young clergyman understood something of the emotion that Daniel must have felt when he made out that there really were lions in the corner of that den.

"I don't believe that I have ever had the—pleasure of meeting Mr. Birmingham," he temporized.

"No, but you know him by sight, don't you?" Flossie answered eagerly. "He's the tallest man on the street, and so strong! Why, the other day two men were quarreling in a saloon on Water Street, and he just took them, one in each hand, and bumped their heads together like—like dolls! Any one can point him out to you, if you don't know him."

"Yes, yes, I know who he is," Mr. Cotton admitted hastily. "I was only thinking—he has never been to the chapel, I believe, and he might think I was—"

"No, he was away when you came," Flossie explained apologetically. "He was off on a fishing trip, you know, and since he came back—well, he hasn't been quite himself."

She struggled with a sob.

"Yes, I understand; but—"

"That's why I have come to you, Mr. Cotton. He *isn't* himself, really. If he were, I could talk to him. But he is so—so *fierce*, if I say a word! He gets so angry that I'm frightened. He has never been like this before!"

There was terror beneath the tears in her blue eyes.

The picture was not reassuring to Mr. Cotton. He had seen Jack Birmingham on more than one occasion, and the idea of urging the beauty of holiness upon that high-tempered giant was dismaying. It is one thing to give battle to sin as an abstraction — a sort of vaporous cloud that won't hit back — and it is quite another thing to tell a man like Jack Birmingham that he is drinking too much. Mr. Cotton knew that he would have to do it. He had no doubt as to his duty; but there is no denying that he felt like a raw recruit on the eve of a battle.

"As soon as I see a good opportunity," he said, clearing his throat.

"Oh, don't wait! Don't put it off!" Flossie cried, clasping her hands in supplicating eagerness. "I'm afraid something terrible will happen. You don't know how afraid I am!"

"I shall make a point of speaking to him without delay," Mr. Cotton said.

Flossie's look of grateful admiration made him reflect that, after all, true courage is of the inner man, and that sometimes quite unmilitary persons are able, by sheer force of character, to dominate mere brute strength.

III

THIS pleasant theory buoyed up Mr. Cotton's spirits until he actually found himself, on the following day, face to face with brute force in the person of Jack Birmingham. Though the young clergyman's breath fled from him and his thoughts whirled, to his credit be it said that he stood square in the path of the approaching sinner.

Birmingham was in that pleasantly exalted state which Jack London called "jingled." He looked down at the small man who had stopped his progress, and made an obvious effort to focus his vision upon the object.

"Well, sonny?" he said genially. "What do you want?"

Mr. Cotton stiffened. Even his meekness resented that term.

"You are Mr. Birmingham, I believe," he said, with as much dignity as was consistent with tipping his head up to see the man he addressed.

"My friends call me Jack," said Birmingham suspiciously. "Who are you?"

"I hope you will regard me as a friend," said Mr. Cotton. "May I speak to you for a few minutes?"

"Book agent?" Jack demanded.

"No. I wish merely—"

"Got something to sell, haven't you?"

"No, no! I am trying—"

"Here, want the price of a meal?"

"No! I am—"

"Hold on—let me guess," interrupted Jack. "Don't tell me! If I can't guess what you are after in three guesses, I'll know I've had a glass too much. Now—"

"That is what I wanted to speak to you about, Mr. Birmingham."

"Jack, if you are a friend."

"Jack, then. You *have* had a glass too much, and as a friend I tell you that you ought to ch-change your habits."

The words were bold, but the effect, unfortunately, was somewhat marred by Mr. Cotton's stammering nervousness.

Jack Birmingham bent down with his

hands on his knees, to bring his face nearer to that of his challenger.

"You're a parson—that's what you are!" he cried triumphantly. "I knew I could guess, give me a chance!" Then he frowned portentously. "What's that you are trying to say about my habits?"

"You drink—"

"And I bet that's more than you can do, too! Ever try it, parson?" Jack asked insolently.

"You drink more than you ought to."

"How do you know?" demanded Jack.

"Everybody knows."

"And everybody else knows that it's my own affair. You've got nerve, parson, even if you are an atom—more nerve than sense. What's to prevent my picking you up right now and dropping you over the fence into that mudhole?"

"Nothing, but it would prove that I am right. No man in his senses would do a thing like that unless he was drunk."

"Got me there!" muttered Jack. "See here, you celestial policeman, who put you on to me?"

Mr. Cotton did not answer promptly, and Jack reached down a sudden hand and caught him by his thin shoulder. Unconsciously he shook the little man as he would have shaken an obdurate child.

"Can't you speak? Was it just your infernal meddlesomeness, or did some one set you on? *Did my wife set you on me?*"

The big man's tone was ominous.

Mr. Cotton pulled himself free and straightened his shoulders inside his ruffled coat. This gave him a moment for consideration. Before his inner eye there came the vision of Flossie's frightened face and her tearful voice. This brute would probably beat her—

"Was it my wife?" demanded Birmingham, with deadly quiet.

"No, it was not your wife. Your wife has nothing to do with my speaking to you," said this minister of the gospel, looking Birmingham straight in the eye.

Jack held him with a penetrating look for a moment, and then dropped his hand again upon the small man's shoulder.

"We'll see about that," he said. "You come with me. If you have lied to me—"

He shut his teeth upon the words, and with more force than persuasiveness he convoyed Mr. Cotton to the cottage in the quiet street where he had set up housekeeping two years before. It was a pretty cottage, with a front yard in which the roses grew with riotous freedom, and an inviting settle beside the doorway.

"Sit down there," said Jack Birmingham, indicating the settle with a peremptory gesture. "Stay there till I call you inside!"

Then he went into the cottage.

Mr. Cotton sank down upon the seat, not so much in obedience to the behest as because he was, for the moment, completely unnerved. By habit as well as principle, he was a speaker of the truth, and the lie which had slipped so spontaneously from his lips had recoiled upon his conscience with the shattering effect of an explosive. That he was likely to be found out was only a secondary disturbance, yet that, too, shook him. He had heard the common saying on the street that Jack Birmingham could abide anything rather than a coward or a liar.

"Floss!" Jack's imperious voice rang through the house and came out through the open door to the waiting Mr. Cotton.

"Yes, dear!" came the answer, accompanied by a sound of scurry. "Why, dear, what is it?"

Mr. Cotton could not see the speakers, but from the voices he judged that the two were standing in the hall just within the doorway.

"Floss, have you been complaining of me to that busybody parson of yours?"

"Jack!"

"*Have* you? Have—you—told—him—that — your — husband — drinks — too— much?"

Mr. Cotton rose softly from his seat and entered the open door. He would at least do what he could to restrain this brute from physical violence toward his wife. Perhaps he could divert the ruffian's anger to himself.

Jack saw him, and frowned ferociously. Flossie did not see him, and therefore took the frown to herself. She had a moment of dizzy terror. This was worse than anything she had imagined.

Then, suddenly, the womanly Florence who had been hidden so long under the pretty Flossie asserted herself, and it was the voice of the womanly Florence that answered steadily:

"Yes, Jack, I did. I'd do more than that. I'd do *anything* to make you see what you are doing. I shouldn't deserve to be your wife if I wasn't ready to do anything and everything I can to bring you back to your senses!"

For a moment Jack Birmingham stared at his wife in amazed silence. Then he looked at Mr. Cotton, pale but determined, in the doorway. Then he threw back his head and laughed loud and long.

"Well, with a wife who isn't afraid to tell the truth, and a parson who isn't afraid to tell a lie, I'm a lucky man! By George, I won't go back on either of you. I'll swear off from this day—and when I say I will, I will!"

And as Jack Birmingham demanded the truth of himself as well as from others, he did.

A Life Line for Harriet

THE STORY OF A GIRL WHO WAS AFRAID THAT SHE WOULD NEVER BE MARRIED

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

HARRIET had made her début when she was nineteen. She had been kept back, as her mother phrased it, until Jessie was married. Sadie and Jessie had been "out" together, and it was inadvisable for the third sister to be in evidence until the other two were married off.

When Harriet left school, it was agreeable to know that Dotty was six years younger, and so couldn't come treading on her heels. How the years had raced by, and how developed Dotty was now for her seventeen years!

Harriet's first two winters had been, to her, like a dream come true. Dances galore and partners in plenty—what more could a girl wish? It was her mother, with wise, experienced eyes, who saw that the partners were constantly changing, that everybody liked Harriet and nobody was paying her devoted attention—unless one counted Joe Hayes, who hardly counted at all. Joe was sawed off in stature, with a large mouth, and one eye smaller than the other, giving him the expression of an unfinished gargoyle.

The Nelson home was friendly and hospitable, and the young people of the town had formed the habit of dropping in, sure of warmth and welcome. An unusual touch was given to the family life by the fact that "dad," as all the girls' friends called him, was no submerged tenth. He was a genial, entertaining host and a shark at bridge.

Without a care passed the winter when Harriet was nineteen and the winter when she was twenty. The next two seasons might have been called the Arthur Burton period. Burton came to Yarborough to live, met Harriet, and took an immediate liking to her. A few weeks later—he had seen her frequently in the meantime—he said in his abrupt fashion:

"Look here, I want to lay all the cards on the table. I'm engaged to be married to a girl at home, but the engagement isn't to be announced until she finishes college, and she still has two years. If you and I can be good pals—why, it will make all the difference in my life here; but I don't want to take up too much of your time."

"That's all right," promised Harriet easily. "I know how to be a good friend better than anything else. It's my long suit. I won't tell a soul about your engagement, and I appreciate your telling me." She looked at him with her happy blue eyes, full of good humor and the joy of living. "You know I'm not the sort of girl who goes in for quiet corners and lovemaking and petting. I like crowds, and fun, and a lot of noise—I just *do!*"

Harriet said it lightly. The realization of its absolute truth came to her gradually. Men didn't make love to her, except Joe now and then. She was too big. Perhaps the majority of men found five feet nine rather too much for a wife.

Harriet was straight as a pine sapling,

with a good fresh skin, laughing eyes, and a vibrant voice which was sometimes too loud. She brimmed with vitality, and there was always a crowd around her.

Burton, tall, handsome in a dark, saturnine way, found her so stimulating as a companion that his good resolutions not to engross her vanished into thin air. They went everywhere together. He was a distinguished-looking cavalier, particular about sending the right flowers, and in seeing to it that the girl whom he signaled for his favors should receive all the attention due her.

"Why should I take some girl to a dance who bores me to extinction, merely because she previously bored me by inviting me to dinner?" he would demand petulantly. "Why should you go with Hayes, whose head barely reaches to your chin, when your step and mine suit to perfection, and dancing together is a joy?"

At the end of Burton's second winter in Yarborough, when all the town was tranquilly expecting the announcement of their engagement, he came to Harriet's one evening, stirred out of his usual nonchalance.

"I'm in luck, I suppose," he began sullenly. "I've been offered a better salary in my home town. Leila will like that. You know she graduates in June."

There was no response. With hands which were not quite steady, Harriet was pulling the petals from a rose—Harriet, who liked flowers.

"It will seem strange not to see you. We—we have been together so much. We have been such pals." His voice had a queer note, almost as if he were angry. "I had rather never to have known you than to find it so hard to tell you good-by. It's like a wrench—like being uprooted." He broke off abruptly. "Good-by. It's the last time. Kiss me once, Hallie, will you?"

She lifted her face to his. On the train he recalled that she had not spoken at all.

When she was alone again, she spoke aloud and saw clearly—and to see clearly was what saved her.

"He was thinking only of himself! He has thought of himself all along! He didn't even realize how lonely I would be without him!"

When Burton married, Yarborough voiced the unanimous opinion that he had "consoled himself pretty soon." Of course, everybody knew that when Harriet had rejected him, in the spring, he had left town in a huff, without saying good-by to his friends.

II

Jessie had a cottage on the coast that summer, and Harriet spent three months with her—a lazy summer out of doors, playing with Jessie's bewitching babies. Then home in the autumn—the same home, but amazingly different.

Dotty seemed to have sprung up overnight. She had enjoyed the full run of the house during vacation, and now it was her friends who were everywhere — the Eel's Knees, as they delighted to call themselves. Harriet's set seemed to have dissolved by some mysterious alchemy. The married ones belonged to the younger married set, and those who were left were either engaged or had gone to work.

Harriet was to be a bridesmaid at Susie Neal's wedding, and maid of honor at Meg Dalton's. Dotty was sent off to school—a tearful and protesting Dotty, who begged to stay at home and go as a day scholar to the Gilbert School for Girls, which in her mother's day had been the Young Ladies' Select Seminary.

After her youngest daughter was dispatched, Mrs. Nelson took up the matter with Harriet.

"Dotty will be eighteen next fall, and I don't see how I can insist on her going back to school. Ed Canfield seems very much in earnest. He's eight years older than Dot, and he's begging her to promise to marry him. He was at the station to see her off, and he brought her a huge corsage bouquet of orchids. It was much too old for Dotty—that's why it pleased her so."

"Ed Canfield!" said Harriet slowly. "Dot's so pretty, mother!"

Mrs. Nelson suddenly kissed her, understanding the generosity of Harriet's unspoken thought. She must put no stumbling block in Dot's path. The other two girls had married well, but Ed Canfield was the son of Yarborough's wealthiest citizen, and an attractive fellow as well.

Harriet could not sit around a home swarming with the Eel's Knees, and with Dotty's probable engagement making her own lack of success the more noticeable. For the first time in her happy, heedless days she faced herself as a social failure.

"Mother!" she cried, bewildered. "Why, I'm going to be an old maid!"

"Nonsense, dear," soothed her mother. "There's from now until June before Dot comes home for good; and Joe so perfectly devoted to you—" At the aghast look on Harriet's face she continued smoothly: "And who knows what nice man you may happen to meet, child? *Prince Charming* may be around the next corner!"

"If he is," said Harriet very slowly, very thoughtfully, her mind glancing backward over the past four years, "he'll dance with me, he'll play tennis with me, he'll take me out in his car, he'll tell me I'm the best pal a fellow ever had, especially when he's blue; and then, after a while, he'll come in beaming to tell me he's in love with Meg or Clare—oh, any of the girls, but it won't be me!"

"There's Joe." This time her mother's voice had the tender defiance of the days when she used to bind up a cut finger with the assurance, "There, there! Nothing shall hurt mother's baby girl!" There was a shade of reproof, too, in Mrs. Nelson's tone. "Joe has never looked at any one but you in his life. You shouldn't talk as if nobody cared for you when a fine, honorable man like Joe has been in love with you ever since you were a schoolgirl."

"Imagine Joe by Ed Canfield!"

"I can imagine him very well," her mother replied steadily. "Of course, Ed has more money and better looks, but a girl doesn't marry just the present generation. Those who were behind a man go into his inheritance, and into his children's inheritance. I don't suppose there's a young man in Yarborough with as fine an ancestry as Joe's—a long line of good men, holding high positions of trust in the State, and of dignified gentlewomen. Joe is better born than Ed, and we both know it."

"I'll never marry a one-eyed runt like Joe as long as I live!" declared Harriet hotly. "Of course, I'm awfully fond of him in a way. He was so understanding about—about Arthur Burton."

Harriet did not realize that nothing had added so much to her desirability in Joe's eyes as the preference shown her by a handsome, sophisticated man like Burton.

"Mother, what shall I do next winter?" Harriet asked slowly.

"I've been thinking a great deal about that, daughter. If we're to give Dotty the same pleasures you girls had, it would be a big help to dad if you could be independent for a year. Would you like to stay with your Aunt Mattie at Warrenton, and teach domestic science in the high school? Her husband is on the school board, and you do get along so wonderfully with children. But there's time enough to think about that. Trot along, now, darling, and bring me your cerise frock. It's going to be hard to fix spiral ruffles after such a long period of chemise frocks."

Harriet wore the finished gown to the rehearsal of Meg's wedding, to which she went with Joe.

"Did you know that Meg had arranged for us to wait on her together, and I balked?" asked Joe. "'Once to the altar, never again.' I'm not superstitious, but I'll take no chance against the one thing I want most in the world!"

It swept over Harriet that for her own sake, as well as Joe's, she must settle matters finally. She slipped her hand through his arm, as if the friendly contact might soften the words:

"That can never be, Joe. Please always be my very best friend, because that's all I can be to you—*ever*."

She could not see his face in the darkness. She could only hear the strained note in his voice:

"Ever since I was a man I've had that one clear picture in my mind—a home, you in it, lots of jolly flowers in the yard, and maybe—"

He broke off, and presently spoke again in his matter-of-fact way:

"Father wants me to go to Buenos Aires early next month. He has a cousin out there who seems to be quite influential, and who has written for me to come. Mother thinks it will do me good to get out of the rut of office work and see a little of the world. I hadn't decided—until now."

"Buenos Aires!" echoed Harriet dismally. "Why, Joe, that's almost at the bottom end of South America! It's on the other side of the equator! I never even heard of anybody who went to Buenos Aires."

But go he did, on the next steamer. His friends gave him a farewell dinner and trooped to the train to say good-by. Perhaps Joe himself was surprised to realize how many friends he had.

III

The immediate effect of Joe's departure, where Harriet was concerned, was that she had no escort for the next dance. It was the first time that had happened since her début more than four years before.

Then Mrs. Nelson took a quiet but capable hand in affairs. She was not the obvious "managing mother." She provided for her girls the background of a hospitable home and an unfailing welcome, and let things take their course. It had been like a well oiled machine which runs as easily as a motor coasts down hill. Now there was method in the choice of guests at her famous Sunday night suppers and jolly small dinners. Harriet was well aware that it was through her mother's unflagging interest and clever aid that her fifth winter went by, and people were still talking of her popularity and saying how well she held her own against the younger set.

Sometimes the praise rankled, as when a married woman remarked to her:

"I said the other night at the theater that you are the only girl in town who is always invited to everything that comes."

"Not a very exciting suitor," laughed Harriet. "It was Judge Barnard, a friend of dad's, and deaf as a post, but I've always been fond of him."

"His big car seems to be at your disposal," teased the other; "and he's a widower."

Harriet felt suddenly sick. Judge Barnard, sixty-one years old! What did it matter to her whether he had two wives under the sod or one in the flesh?

One March morning she met Joe's mother on the street—a woman whom she had always admired.

"Good morning, Harriet. What do you think of Joe's offer?" Mrs. Hayes asked with characteristic directness.

"I—I haven't heard about it," Harriet stammered.

It suddenly occurred to her that there had been a longer lapse than usual between Joe's letters.

"Our cousin wishes him to stay there. He has taken a great fancy to Joe, and made him an excellent offer to go into his office. Of course, he always has the place with his father open to him, and now that we are growing elderly the Argentine seems a long way to one's only son; but, like all mothers, I want him to choose what is best for his advancement and happiness."

Harriet walked home in a daze. She found Joe's last letter and reread it. There was not a word of love in it. It might have been written to a maiden aunt.

One paragraph stood out in scorching letters:

> They say the Chileans are the prettiest women in South America, but they must be peaches if they can beat some of the girls I met at that dance—the real Spanish type, eyes as big as brown velvet moons.

Harriet had laughed over that when she read it for the first time, and had forgotten it. Now it swept over her, pitiless as a tidal wave. Joe was going to stay away forever. He was going to marry a girl from Argentina or Chile—oh, it didn't matter if she were a Patagonian!

She, Harriet Nelson, was never to marry at all. She faced the inexorable, inescapable fact.

She was made for domesticity. She wanted to go into her own, own kitchen and make cakes and put up marmalade. She knew the very pattern of kitchen cupboard she would choose. Of course, other girls went to work and were satisfied in it, but she knew she would abominate an office or teaching school. The very thought of it choked her, terrified her. She liked a home, and fussing around the pantry, and embroidering table linen, and transplanting seedlings, and bathing babies.

Never to develop her own ideas in anything, from a vegetable garden to the furniture of a sun porch! Never to have one's own baby, and to keep it as sweet and fresh as a little warm rose! That had been in Joe's dreams, too. She remembered how his voice had trembled as he broke off:

"And maybe—"

Her father had given her a little money, the week before, for her birthday gift. She went straight to the telegraph office and spent her entire capital on a cable to Buenos Aires.

> Please come home, Joe. I miss you.
>
> HALLIE.

IV

THERE was no answer. Joe's guardian angel must have been at his elbow, cautioning him not to cable. He caught the first available steamer, instead, but for weeks Harriet had lived in wretched uncertainty. The cable had never reached him, or it had reached him and he thought it kinder to take no notice of it, being infatuated with some designing South American girl!

When he appeared one morning, directly from the train, he found Harriet alone in the library. She had on a pink gingham morning frock, which made her look younger and brought out the wholesome color of her skin and the blueness of her eyes. She gave a half articulate sob when she saw who it was, and went straight into Joe's open arms.

" Oh, honey," he said, " I'm so tired of black-eyed girls! Just let me look at you!"

She called that tremendous impulse of relief and joy at seeing him " falling in love," and she honestly believed it. It never occurred to her that she felt toward Joe as the drowning might feel to a rope.

Events followed in their well-known order. The engagement was announced at a delightful luncheon. There ensued a round of entertaining for the bride elect, and the wedding was in the last week in June, with an ecstatic Dotty as maid of honor. Everybody said that it was an ideal match and they had always expected it.

In the account of the wedding the morning paper spoke of Harriet as " Yarborough's acknowledged belle," and the groom thrilled with pride at having won her over all competitors. Yarborough people spoke of the massive silver pitcher which Judge Barnard sent as " most magnanimous under the circumstances." Even dignified Mrs. Hayes had a sense of gratification that the distinguished jurist was the latest feather ascribed to Harriet's cap.

Mrs. Nelson interpreted Harriet's fears during the winter as " the time when she was so nervous and low-spirited because Joe was away." Harriet, who was not a thinker, accepted her mother's theory. It was unimportant, anyhow, for anybody can find new reasons for things, but china lasts; and the really important matter was the dinner set that Joe and herself must choose.

Never for them the crystalline air of the high hills; but neither of them would ever know that the heights were there, being busily occupied with their days in the pleasant valley country, where one finds a denser population and perhaps a better chance of " living happy ever after."

A PEDDLER CRIES IN THE CITY

Lady, here's a lilac
 That knows a rural lane,
That sweetens all nostalgia
 And soothes the heart with pain;
And daffodils for maidens
 By walls deprived of light,
And roses to caress a cheek
 Where tears have lain at night.

I've violets from meadows
 That gladden under trees,
To take the pallor from your woes,
 The stiffness from your knees;
And here, *madame,* a tulip
 Is very, very nice;
For two I get a nickel—
 And cheap at half the price!

You say they soon will wither?
 Well, so will you, *madame!*
Who else will buy a flower?
 Then let your window slam!
You lodgers in the back rooms,
 Who for the fields may thirst,
Who'll buy a wind-tossed daisy?
 Pray, who will be the first?

Charles Divine

The Twisted Foot

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT WEST

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Rider of Golden Bar," etc.

SAM CALTROP, manager of the Eighty-Eight Ranch, and Rum Gordon, the foreman, order Buff Warren, one of their cowboys, to drive off a family of "nesters," who have defied the cattlemen by settling on the range, and have actually dared to plow up a patch of it. Buff finds that Abijah Fair, head of the offending family, is blind, and the eldest daughter, Gilian, is such a pretty girl that the cowboy loses his heart to her. Moved by sympathy and love, instead of molesting the Fairs, he declares himself on their side, and helps them with their plowing. This act of treason, as it seems to all good cattlemen, necessitates the resignation of his job at the Eighty-Eight.

The next day sees Buff again at the Fairs' place, where he learns that some unknown enemy has just driven off their little bunch of cattle. He follows the raider—who proves to be one Andy Tresawna, a gambler—and, after a sharp encounter, turns him over to the sheriff as a cattle thief. Gilian Fair is grateful for this service, but she refuses to marry Buff; and he is further disquieted by finding evidence of secret meetings between her and some unknown man, whom he suspects of being identical with a notorious outlaw known as the Twisted Foot.

Joe Ma[illegible], the sheriff, has a horse of whose speed he is proud. Seeking new employment, Buff Warren induces Joe to promise that if Buff's horse, Buster, can beat his champion, he will appoint the former cowboy and his cousin, Bill Holliday, deputy sheriffs. After the race—which Buster wins—Buff meets Holliday, and the latter, who is recklessly celebrating with a bottle of whisky, reveals that he tricked the sheriff by making his horse drink a quantity of water just before the contest.

XVI (*continued*)

BUFF WARREN departed in search of a pail of water. He soon returned with one.

"Here, Bill," said he, setting it down in front of his cousin. "Stick the old noddle in that."

"Anything to 'blige," replied the genial Holliday, and promptly sank his head in over his ears. "Tha's fine!" he declared, coming up to blow.

Bill went back to his seat on the whisky keg, where he sat up stiffly straight, with runnels of water trickling down inside his shirt, and breathed hard through his nostrils. Buff Warren had high hopes that the cold water application might have sobered his relative in some degree; but the latter's first words were enough to dispel that delusion.

"Whu-when shall we three meet again?" he stuttered sadly, and violently shook the totally empty bottle. No answering guggle meeting his listening ear, he threw the bottle from him. "I've had enough," he added with firmness.

"I think you have," agreed Buff. "This is a fine time for you to get plastered—a fine time!"

"Cuc-couldn't be better," smiled his cousin. "Gul-lad you agree with me. Go by-by now."

So saying, Holliday slipped sidewise from the keg, slumped full length on the grass, and composed himself to slumber. His head was resting on a rock.

In stooping to remove the rock, Buff brushed aside with his hands the tall grass growing close to the trunk of the largest cottonwood, and glimpsed what had been hidden by the grass—a small triangular crack in the base of the trunk. He would not have given the crevice a second thought, had he not seen within it a bit of white.

When he had disposed of the rock and laid his cousin's head on a couple of handfuls of pulled grass, he inserted his fingers in the crack and withdrew the object of which the bit of white that he had seen was

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part. It proved to be a folded piece of paper. This he opened and spread out on his knee.

Printed on it, in pencil, were these words:

> Just heard that J. C. Marysville is taking ten thousand head of steers to Paradise Bend on the 18th.

There was no signature, unless a large figure 2, written below the printing, was intended to serve as such.

Buff put back the note where he had found it. Who "J. C. Marysville" was he did not know; but he knew that ten thousand head of steers were an unbelievably large herd to take to Paradise Bend. While cattle were frequently driven out of the Paradise Bend country, none, to his knowledge, was ever driven in.

Again, why not mail what purported to be a simple business communication through the post office, instead of stuffing it into a hollow tree? And why not sign it openly, instead of lurking in furtive fashion behind a number? If it had been a love letter, Buff would have understood the mystery.

He reflected on the puzzle as he went to find the sheriff, and forgot it completely the instant he crossed the official threshold. Later he found good cause to wish that he had given more thought to the mysterious letter. If he had done so, many things would not have come to pass.

The sheriff, at his desk in the office, looked up as Buff entered. He did not appear especially pleased.

"Mornin', Buff," said he. "What's this I hear about you throwin' in with this nester at McFluke's place?"

"How you mean, throwin' in?" demanded Buff, instantly on the alert.

"Helping him plow his land—which is a plenty."

"Oh, that! True enough—I did it with my lil plow."

The sheriff frowned at this levity.

"Of course I knew you'd got his cattle back for him. That was all right. I don't like nesters much, but we can't allow rustlers to run off their stock. What I didn't know, when I made that bet with you, was that you'd quit the Eighty-Eight—"

"Sure you knew," interrupted Buff. "I told you myself, there in the gully by Packsaddle."

"I know you told me you'd quit," the sheriff admitted, with some acerbity; "but you didn't tell me you'd quit after a row with Sam over your plowin' this nester's land for him. I didn't know that, Buff. I been in and out of town so much and so quick I ain't heard a bit of the news. You ought to told me, Buff!"

"If I had, you wouldn't have made this bet?"

"You can gamble I wouldn't! I hear, too, you held up Sam and Rum when they were going down to run the nester off."

"Who told you—a lil bird?"

"Nemmine who told me. I was told all right. Fine goings-on for my deputy to be mixed up in!"

"I wasn't your deputy then," pointed out Buff.

"But you will be—and Bill Holliday, too, damn the luck! Bill—there's another one! I might have guessed he had a special reason for wanting a job—messing up Sam and Rum so bad neither of 'em will be out for a week!"

"That's sure tough," grieved Buff.

"I expect you're feeling mighty mournful about it," said the sheriff, with sarcasm. "Look here, Buff, I got a proposition for you and Bill. What will you take to let me off this bet?"

"I don't know what Bill will take," was the prompt reply, "but I won't take a thing."

"I'll see you get another job somewheres—a good job."

"Oh, it ain't that. I can get a job for myself, 'most any time, 'most anywhere. It just happens I want to be a deputy—that's all."

"But see here, Buff—look how hard it makes it for me," said the sheriff anxiously. "I don't mind saying the Eighty-Eight ain't the only outfit that's been objecting to your appointment."

"I thought you said Rum and Sam had been put to bed for a week."

"Well," said the sheriff sheepishly, "I suppose I might as well tell you. Mis' Caltrop was in town this morning, getting some medicine for the invalids, and she heard about this appointment. She came to see me right away, and I don't mind saying she said a whole lot. She sure walked into me like a horse into a corral! I'm glad she ain't my wife. You see how it is, Buff. All these outfits are friends of mine. I get along with 'em all right, and with election coming on I need their votes. If I appoint you, they won't take into consideration how you won the appointment on a bet. The only thing they'll see is that I appointed you—a fellah who likes nesters; and they won't vote for me. See?"

Buff nodded.

"I see," he said soberly enough, not in the least intending, however, to relinquish his appointment.

Although he had won it through the questionable methods of his cousin, he had no compunction in forcing the sheriff to keep his word. With Gilian's welfare, as he saw it, and the welfare of her family in the balance, nothing else mattered. In no other way than by wearing the star of a deputy would he be able to help the Fairs.

"Well?" said the sheriff. "How about it, Buff?"

"I don't like to disoblige you, Joe, but I guess I'll have to have the job. That goes for Bill, too."

"All right! My word's good. Get Bill, and I'll swear you in."

"Bill's keeping that engagement of his. He'll be along."

"Then we'll leave it till after the trial. If you see Nap anywhere, Buff, I wish you'd tell him I'd like to see him."

XVII

JUDGE DOLAN, pale-faced, black-haired, surveyed his office with blank black eyes. He neither coughed, nor fiddled with the papers on his desk. He was a jurist of a somewhat unusual type. Although a small, unimpressive man, the known fact that he could drive nails with a derringer at twenty yards added cubits to his stature.

The court room was packed As many residents of Farewell and the vicinity as could squeeze themselves in, had done so. Among the more solid citizens were Alicran Skeel, foreman and manager of the Hogpen Ranch; Jim Richie, of the Cross-in-a-Box; Mike Flynn, of the Blue Pigeon Store; Joy Blythe, Mike's partner; two ex-sheriffs and their former chief deputies; Piney Jackson, the blacksmith; Bill Lainey, the hotel keeper; Calloway, postmaster and storekeeper; Captain Benjamin Burr; Carlson, the owner of the livery stable; Chuck Morgan, a small rancher, and several of his friends.

All these filled two benches and overflowed on the window sills or into the crowd of standees. On another bench, almost directly in front of the judgment desk, sat Andy Tresawna, with his head bandaged, flanked by Sheriff Mack and his fat chief deputy, Nap Tobias. Sitting beside the sheriff was Pencil Yandle, a lawyer and one-time resident of Philadelphia, yellow-faced, yellow-haired, smooth as oil, and twice as slippery. Behind the bench upon which the prisoner sat were grouped several of his friends — gentlemen living by their wits—and Hilario Chavez, the ex-bartender of the Starlight Saloon.

It was to be remarked that none of the Eighty-Eight outfit was in the court room.

On a fourth bench, in line with the prisoner's bench, sat Buff Warren, young Bobby Fair, Gilian, and Mrs. Fair. The Wilhemina twin and Jemima were not present. They had remained at home to take care of their father, and Rainbow had stayed with them.

Judge Dolan, having inspected the audience, pulled a pad toward him, picked up a pencil, and fixed his eyes on the sheriff.

"What's the trouble?" he asked in a conversational tone.

The sheriff stood up and made reply at some length. The judge wrote rapidly upon his pad.

"Any witnesses?" he asked, looking up.

The sheriff indicated Bob Fair and Buff Warren.

"We'll take the young one first," said the judge. "Stand up, young man. Look me in the eye, and don't be scared. I won't hurt you. Do you know the nature of an oath?"

The small boy shifted from one foot to the other, and gulped painfully. Under the stare of so many strange eyes he shrank and wilted.

Judge Dolan showed himself remarkably human. He arose, went to the frightened youngster, picked him up, and set him on the edge of the judge's desk, with his back to the court room.

"There!" said the jurist. "Don't pay any attention to the other people in the room. They don't count. Now hold up your right hand and repeat after me."

Under this kindly urging young Bob acquitted himself like a major. He took the oath without a falter, and still without a falter told the judge exactly what he had seen. His story was sufficiently damaging to the rustler of the cattle, but he mentioned no names.

When he made an end, the judge turned him about to face the spectators.

"Do you see in this court room the man who ran off the cattle?"

The boy lifted his arm and pointed a steady finger at Tresawna.

"That's him," he said convincingly, if ungrammatically.

Instantly Pencil Yandle was on his feet, but the judge forestalled him.

"Not yet, Mr. Yandle," said the jurist. "I'll hear you later. Bobby, you did very well. You may go back to the bench. Mr. Warren, stand forward, and hold up your right hand."

Buff, having been sworn, gave his share of the evidence, and identified Tresawna as the man whom he had discovered driving the cattle away from the Fair place. When he sat down, the judge turned to the prisoner's attorney.

"Witnesses for the defense now, Mr. Yandle!"

Pencil Yandle — "Pencil" representing the natural shrinkage undergone by Pennsylvania in a dry atmosphere—responded by leaping to his feet. It was his second leap, and it was even more energetic than his first. The leap was followed by a legal bow.

"Your honor," said the lawyer, and paused. He swept back his yellow hair, threw out his chest, flung back the lapels of his coat, and stuck three fingers into his vest. "Your honor," he repeated, "I will show that there is malice in this case. I will show that the evidence on the side of the plaintiff is a tissue of lies, fabricated out of whole cloth, and a base slander against the fair name of my client, our respected citizen, Mr. Andrew Tresawna, who, I may say—"

"You may not say," the judge interrupted with firmness. "Your esteemed client is known to us all. Stick to the point, Mr. Yandle!"

"Your honor," said Yandle, nothing abashed, "I will endeavor to do so. Permit me to state, sir, that my blood boils when I think of the vile manner in which my client has been defamed—defamed, sir, and reduced to such agony of mind and spirit as my poor linguistic powers are unable to portray."

"You're making a healthy stab at it," tucked in the judge. "Keep your feet on the ground, Mr. Yandle, and call your witnesses, if you have any."

"I was on the point of doing so, your honor," declared Yandle, affecting a look of pain; "but first I merely wish to make plain to your honor the atrocious, malignant, and utterly reckless fashion in which this pillar of our society, my client, has been libeled."

Yandle snuffled loudly, and reached for his hip pocket.

"You're about three jumps ahead of your regular schedule," interposed the judge heartlessly. "I've never known you to shed tears until well into the trial. This is only the hearing."

Nevertheless Yandle drew out his handkerchief, dabbed at his red-rimmed, watery eyes, and blew his nose.

"Your honor," he said in a trembling voice, "emotion overcomes me. I am affected to the depths of my being. Not content with slandering my client, one of the plaintiffs has endeavored to affect the outcome of the trial by shooting one of my witnesses."

"Better tell your witness to pull quicker next time," advised the unsympathetic judge. "Have you any other witnesses?"

"Of course, your honor. I—"

"Then call your witnesses!" thundered the judge.

"At once, your honor," said Pencil Yandle, and turned to the spectators. "Hilario Chavez!" he called in a loud tone.

With a smirk and a leer the dark-faced Mexican stepped forward. He was sworn, and gave evidence to the effect that at the time when Bob Fair and Buff Warren were supposed to have seen Andrew Tresawna driving the Fair cattle, he, Andrew Tresawna, was with him, Hilario Chavez, and four other men, playing poker in the Chavez cabin in Farewell.

After dwelling once more upon the flagitious villainy of Buff Warren in shooting Stony Flint, an important witness for the defense, Yandle successively called the three unpunctured gentlemen of the four referred to by Hilario Chavez. The trio, George Bushong, Tex Piper, and Mac Kergow, testified to the same effect as had Chavez.

"I believe, your honor," Yandle said blandly, when the testimony of the three had been taken, "that the evidence that you have just heard is conclusive. Therefore I ask that you dismiss the case."

Buff Warren, exceedingly hot and angry, stood up.

"Your honor, there are two other witnesses who can testify that during part of the time Tresawna's friends say they were playing poker with him, he was in a gully near Packsaddle Creek. I would like to call the sheriff and Cap'n Burr."

Buff expected Yandle to object, but he did nothing of the sort. He sat twiddling his thumbs, his expression that of the cat that has just made away with the canary.

So the captain and the sheriff were called. The first swore that he saw Tresawna in the aforesaid gully at twelve o'clock noon, and remained with him until the gambler was locked up in the Farewell jail that afternoon, except for a few minutes at one time and a few minutes at another time, which gaps were covered by the testimony of Buff and the sheriff. Moreover, the sheriff accounted for Tresawna's time from half past twelve on.

Yandle now arose and preened himself.

"Your honor, the distinguished gentlemen who have so recently given their testimony have apparently made out an excellent case for the plaintiff. Far be it from me even to dream of casting the shadow of a doubt upon their evidence, but"—an impressive pause—"but I must respectfully submit that it does not bear upon the point in question, that it is utterly irrelevant. Therefore I ask that said testimony be excluded from the record."

"Please state your reasons, Mr. Yandle," requested the judge.

"With pleasure, your honor." Yandle spread his legs and tucked both hands beneath his coat tails. "If your honor will consult your notes, you will find that Mr. Warren testified that he came upon the defendant not later than half past ten o'clock by the sun. The boy, Bobby Fair, swears that he saw the defendant before Mr. Warren saw him, and did not see him again until to-day, here in the court room. Am I right, your honor?"

His honor nodded.

"The testimony of my four witnesses covers the movements of Andrew Tresawna from half past eight in the morning until eleven o'clock of the same day. What Mr. Tresawna did after that time I do not know, nor is it any concern of mine."

"Do you mean to tell me," demanded the judge, "that it would be possible for Andy Tresawna to have been seen in Farewell at eleven o'clock, and in that gully on Packsaddle at noon?"

"I mean precisely that, your honor," Yandle averred with his blandest smile.

"What horse could do twenty miles in an hour?" persisted the judge.

"I do not know, your honor. For all I know to the contrary, my client may have ridden relays of horses in order to reach the gully—ahem—on time, as it were."

"'As it were' is good," said the judge, with a sarcastic smile.

"Your honor agrees? I accept the compliment and thank your honor. As I was saying, it lies within my province merely to prove that when the boy Bobby Fair says he saw Andrew Tresawna driving the cattle, and when Mr. Warren says he saw him doing the same thing, my client was miles away in Farewell, peacefully playing cards at the home of a friend. Allow me to reiterate, your honor, that the respective testimonies of Captain Burr and the sheriff are irrelevant, in that they cover only the time from noon on. They do not in any way touch upon what is alleged to have occurred previously. Again permit me to submit that no case has been made against my client, and to request that he be released from custody."

"Your point is well taken, Mr. Yandle," admitted Judge Dolan; "yet there is one flaw in its purity. Throughout the time Hilario Chavez and George Bushong say they were playing poker with the defendant—in fact, it was about seven in the morning when their presence was called to my attention—both these men were lying dead drunk in the grass behind my corral. During the morning I saw these two men at least a dozen times. It was not until after one o'clock that they recovered sufficiently to go down to the stage company trough and soak their fevered heads. Instead of dismissing the case, I will direct the sheriff to take George Bushong and Hilario Chavez into custody on a charge of perjury. I am watching you, Bushong! If your hand drops any lower, it will not be necessary to take you into custody."

The sheriff seized Bushong and disarmed him. Nap Tobias approached Chavez to serve him similarly, when suddenly the Mexican ducked under the arm of a friend and snaked toward a window. The judge sprang upon his desk, but by this time there were at least seven innocent bystanders between him and Chavez.

First of the seven was Buff Warren. He had flung himself after the Mexican at the latter's first move. As Chavez threw himself head first across the window sill, Buff's fingers closed on one leg. Instantly the Mexican whirled back, whipped a knife from beneath his shirt, and made a furious stab at Buff's chest.

Buff dodged to one side, taking with him, however, the Mexican's foot and ankle. Chavez, squirming and wriggling, came down smack on his back. The efficient Buff sent the knife flying from the dark hand with a perfectly directed kick, whisked Chavez over on his face, and pinioned his hands behind him.

"Good work, Buff!" Nap Tobias panted in his ear. "Separate his wrists a little, so I can get the cuffs on him."

When the flurry had subsided, the judge looked about him with keen satisfaction.

"I don't see your other two witnesses, Mr. Yandle," he observed with sarcasm.

"I expect they must have had business," said Yandle, looking a little blue.

"I expect so," concurred the judge. "Since there is no further business before this court, I hereby order that the three prisoners be committed to jail, there to await the action of the grand jury."

Yandle was on his feet, gesticulating with abandon.

"But, your honor, the prisoners have a right to be admitted to bail. If your honor will set the amount, I will see that it is forthcoming."

The judge leaned back and smiled.

"Certainly your clients have a right to bail. I will hold Andrew Tresawna in five thousand dollars, and the other two, Hilario Chavez and George Bushong, in ten thousand dollars apiece."

The attorney's jaw dropped.

"But this is without precedent. This—"

The judge's voice was deadly.

"Mr. Attorney, do you wish me to hold you in contempt?"

"I beg your honor's pardon, but it is with—it is unusual to set such a large amount of bail."

"I have given them all that the law allows," the judge said coldly.

"Very well, your honor. Here is a letter from Mr. Caltrop, owner of the Eighty-Eight Ranch, offering cattle as bail. You will perceive that the space for the number is left blank. If your honor will insert whatever number he sees fit—"

Judge Dolan returned the letter to the attorney.

"If Mr. Caltrop wishes to go bail for these people, he should appear in person before the court."

"But Mr. Caltrop—"

"Not a word, sir! The fact that Mr. Caltrop is a wealthy man and a leading citizen is of no moment. This court recognizes neither wealth nor social position. Furthermore, the law permits me to use my discretion regarding the form that bail shall take. Bail for these prisoners must be in cash."

"In cash, your honor—twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Exactly — twenty-five thousand dollars, in cash."

"You mean a check!"

"I mean gold."

"But—but such an amount cannot be obtained this side of Piegan City, if there!"

"The court is not interested in your difficulties, Mr. Attorney. Any more business? No? Court's adjourned."

XVIII

"YANDLE, if there are any bigger fools than you, I don't know 'em! You wouldn't assay two ounces of horse sense to the ton. Why didn't you do what I told you to do, and make out I only just happened to be riding along behind the cattle? All Buff's evidence and the kid's would have tallied with that; but no, you had to spraddle out with an alibi, and now look at the damn thing! *Look* at it!"

Having thus made known his state of mind, Andy Tresawna spat on the cell floor and glared at his lawyer like an angry cat.

"But I thought—"

"What with?"

"Now, look here, Tresawna! I won't take—"

"You'll take what I choose to give you—that's what you'll take. Damn your soul, getting me cooped up here in the calaboose, and all so you could make a splurge and show folks what a fine lawyer you are!"

"But they can't hold you in jail."

"They're doing it, ain't they?"

"Well—er—the judge seems to have it in for you."

"That's your honest opinion, is it? You're a bright boy! You tell Sam Caltrop to raise that bail and get me out of here. He needn't think I'm going to do his dirty work and pay for it besides!"

"I'll speak to Sam."

"You will, Mr. Yandle, or I'll make you hard to find when I do get out!"

"There is no need of threats," said the lawyer, with dignity. "We're all in this together."

"But me and George and Lario are the only ones in jail. I suppose you think they're tickled to death with the situation!"

"I've seen them. In spite of the fact that they have only themselves to thank for their arrest, they are every bit as unreasonable as you are."

"Unreasonable! *Unreasonable!* You liver-lipped rat!" cried the provoked Tresawna, and reached for Pencil Yandle.

The lawyer evaded his client's rush by a brisk backward skip. With a flip of his right hand he plucked a seven-inch dirk from under his vest, and flourished it menacingly. Tresawna fell back.

"You little devil!" he exclaimed, with some admiration. "I didn't think you had it in you!"

"You'll have it in you, if you try to hop on me again," the lawyer declared grimly. "Sit down and be quiet. That's better. You may as well know, Andy, that I chose our five witnesses because all five were drunk that entire day. They told me none of them left the cabin until late in the afternoon. That is why I supposed I had a steel-cut alibi for you. Neither George Bushong nor Hilario Chavez have the slightest recollection of sleeping behind the judge's corral; nor do they remember soaking their heads in the trough. When they came to, they were in the cabin. So there you are!"

"You mean here I am," remarked Tresawna with bitterness.

"Don't you worry. The grand jury won't indict you when it meets next month. Even if it does, we'll beat the case."

"Even if it does! You mean to say there's any chance of my being indicted?"

"If the jurymen are feeling moral, they may indict you for the mere looks of the thing; but don't let that worry you."

"Oh, no, sure not! First there wasn't any chance of my being dumped, and now, when I am dumped good and proper, it's possible I may be indicted into the bargain. Why, hell's bells, for the matter of that, if the trial jury is feeling moral, I may even be convicted!"

"Let us hope it won't come to that."

"Hope nothing! You tell Caltrop that unless I'm turned loose mighty prompt and soon, I'll tell what I know. I'll tangle him in this business so deep a team of mules can't pull him out!"

"Who do you think would believe you, Mr. Tresawna?"

"The district attorney."

"You've lost your sense of proportion. Mr. Caltrop is a leading member of our social order, while you—forgive me if I wound your feelings—are not. The district attorney would not dream of asking for an indictment against Mr. Caltrop on such evidence as you might give him. Even if the law would permit him to take cognizance of the uncorroborated testimony of an accomplice, it would be incredible that Mr. Caltrop had hired you to run off a nester's few cows. Why, you jest!"

Tresawna's smile was peculiar. There was something about it at variance with his tone and words, when he said:

"But George Bushong and—"

"I think no one but yourself was with Mr. Caltrop at the time he—ahem—made the suggestion which you so unfortunately followed."

"I guess I can get all the testimony I want, if it comes to a pinch. You haven't got a mortgage on all the false witnesses. How about your fixing up this alibi with Chavez and the others? Suppose they snitch on you?"

"In that case," said the lawyer wearily, "I shall be compelled to bring half a dozen witnesses to swear that at the time when the five men say I was with them, framing your alibi, I was, as a matter of fact, elsewhere. What could be simpler?"

"It would be simpler if you hadn't got your last selection in jail," said Tresawna. "Folks are going to think of that and go slow. Now, you listen to me. I ain't making any threats—not a threat. You get me out, you and Caltrop! If I go to jail, I won't stay there forever; and—you might not be ready with your knife another time!"

"Did you fix it, Pencil?" asked Sam Caltrop, as soon as he stood inside the closed and locked door of the lawyer's office.

Yandle nodded.

"Of course I fixed it. Take that chair—it's comfortable. How do you feel?"

"Good enough," grumbled Caltrop, sinking carefully into the proffered chair.

"You look pretty seedy round the edges yet. That beard you seem to be growing isn't an improvement, either. I see you lost a couple of teeth."

"Never mind how I look, or what you see! Are those cigars?"

"Touchy, aren't you? Yes, those are cigars. Have one? Light?"

Caltrop took the proffered match. He puffed his cigar well alight, then took it from between his swelled lips and demanded sharply:

"How did you fix it?"

"Threw the fear of God into the three of them. It was easy with Bushong and the Mexican. The judge has 'em dead to rights, and they know it; but I had to argue with Tresawna. However, I flatter myself that I finally showed him the error of his ways. He's as frightened as the other two are."

"Flatter yourself is right," declared Caltrop, with a peculiar smile. "How about Piper and Kergow?"

"They're lying low, and mighty quiet. I wouldn't be surprised if they left the country of their own accord. I talked to them at length."

"Stony Flint can't leave the country yet. Have you talked to him?"

"I managed a short conversation. I found him rather irritable, but it was the irritability of weakness. We'll have no trouble with Flint. His only wish is to be let alone. Buff Warren certainly backed that fellah off the table. Still, I suppose it would have been simpler if Warren had finished him."

"It would have been simpler if he had finished Warren, damn him! If it hadn't been for him—" Caltrop left the sentence unfinished, and swore again. "Is it true Joe appointed him and that infernal Bill Holliday deputies?"

"Gospel," said Yandle. "We're all so pleased!"

"The sheriff must be crazy. Bet or no bet, he should have got out of it somehow. Appointing those two jiggers deputies, when they're friends of these nesters, is the biggest mistake Joe ever made in his life. Why, the nesters intend to plow the land, and that alone will turn every cowman against them!" Caltrop considered for a moment. "Suppose Tresawna doesn't try to escape?" he concluded nervously.

"He will, especially when a method is provided. That's where I'll demonstrate the superiority of mind over matter. I'll—"

"I don't want to hear it," Caltrop interrupted emphatically. "The less I know about that, the better."

"I thought you'd be interested," the lawyer said in an injured tone, for he loved an audience.

"I'm interested in the end, not the means. You're sure they'll try to escape?"

"Didn't I just say so? You're fidgety, Sam."

"You bet I'm fidgety! So would you be fidgety, if you were let in for putting up twenty-five thousand dollars for bail."

"You won't have to put it up. How many times must I tell you that I've arranged for it all?"

"I wish I could be sure they wouldn't talk after they get out!"

"You said you saw only Tresawna?" put in the lawyer quickly.

"So I did—so I did; but—"

"You've nothing to fear. Uncorroborated evidence of an accomplice, you know, as I've told you several times, doesn't hold in law. Although Tresawna's friends are ordinarily ready to swear that black is white, I believe that hereafter the scoundrels won't be so eager to bear false witness. Besides, those three boys will be hitting the high spots. They won't linger anywhere if they can help it, because jail breaking is a crime carrying a penalty of not less than five years' nor more than ten years' imprisonment, or a fine of five thousand dollars, or both. No, Mr. Caltrop, I think you need have no apprehension regarding Tresawna & Co.!"

Caltrop gnawed his nails, and would not be comforted.

"I swear I don't see how we got into all this mess."

"We?" repeated the lawyer austerely. "We did not get into this mess, as you term it—you got into it yourself. If you had permitted me to manage the affair, I would have attended to all the details that appear to have been overlooked."

"Is that so? How about the little detail of your star witnesses lying drunk all day behind the judge's corral? How about that, huh? Overlooked it, didn't you?"

"As I told you this morning, I had every reason to believe that Bushong and Chavez were telling the truth. I am no more responsible for the error that landed them in jail than I am responsible for the error that landed you in your present pickle."

"You were out when I came to your office," Caltrop grumbled sulkily.

"I returned within two hours. You could have waited; but because you were in too much of a hurry to wait, you had to start the ball rolling yourself with what unfortunate results you know."

"That's right! Rub it in! As if I could have foreseen that Tresawna would bungle it by picking those five drunken sots to help him! Why didn't the fool come to me for orders, when he found out the condition they were in, instead of trying to run off the Fair cattle by himself? If he'd only had one other man with him, the two of them could have fixed that interfering fool of a Buff Warren. It's about time somebody put a crimp in his clock!"

"He has proved very troublesome."

"Troublesome isn't the word. He has upset the pot all over the fire; and now he's a deputy. Oh, lovely!"

"And our business still to do," slyly interjected the lawyer.

"Oh, damn your sneers, and you too, for a slimy attorney! By—"

"Stop right there, Caltrop!" snarled the lawyer. "I've taken all the abuse I'm going to take from anybody to-day. I had to pull my knife on Tresawna, but if I have to pull it on you I'll carve you deep. Do you want me to pull you out of the quicksand you've walked into with your eyes open?"

"Yes," Caltrop said sullenly.

"Then stop, look, and listen. Aren't there any of your men you can trust in a deal of this kind?"

Caltrop shook his head.

"Rum sounded them all. They've found out that the nester's blind, and that makes all the difference in the world to them—the sentimental idiots!"

"It takes all kinds of people to make up a world," said the lawyer sententiously. "A man has to work with the tools at hand. If I were you, I'd drop this business for a month or two. Let it simmer down. Then, later, we can work out some scheme for getting rid of the Fairs."

"Drop nothing!" exclaimed Caltrop. "I don't want—"

"Tell the neighbors, do! I imagine they'll all be interested."

"Well, I don't want to drop this thing," said Caltrop, lowering his voice. "I won't drop it. Nesters are worse than osage orange. Give them half a chance, and they'll spread all over the place. I want to get those devilish Fairs out of there before they take root. Don't you suppose everybody is watching to see how I take this thing? You bet they are. If I pass it over, I might as well go out of the cattle business."

"You exaggerate."

"No, I don't, either. I know what I'm doing."

"Do you? I wonder! As things stand now, it would have been better if you'd offered to buy them out, as I advised, after we discovered that the man was blind."

"Do you think I would waste a dime in that direction, after what's happened?"

"I suppose not," the lawyer said wearily. "I know how stubborn you are. I—"

Footsteps sounded in the short hall leading to the kitchen.

"Now what in—" began the lawyer.

The hall door opened, and Tex Piper and Mac Kergow pushed into the office. Yandle and Caltrop rose from their chairs with goatlike agility.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" demanded the lawyer.

Tex Piper made a gesture with his right hand. The hand held a six-shooter.

"Gentlemen, be seated!"

The gentlemen obeyed. There seemed to be nothing else for them to do. While Tex closed and bolted the hall door, Mac Kergow, displaying a second weapon, advanced upon the lawyer and Caltrop and disarmed them with expert fingers.

Kergow gazed upon Yandle's dirk with frank disgust.

"I never did like a knife. Too Mexican for me! Sam, here, is a perfect lady, with his pearl-handled thirty-eight on a forty-five frame. Don't wiggle so much, Sam! You may have a gun under each arm, for all I know."

"Is this a holdup?" asked Caltrop, in a voice containing no trace of nervousness. "Is this a holdup?" he repeated.

"No—oh, no!" denied Tex in shocked accents. "We saw you come in here, and Mac and I figured it would be a good opportunity for a little conversation. We knew your front door would be locked, Pencil, so we came in through the kitchen. Your cook had gone to the store—not that it would have made any difference. You raised that bail, Sam?"

"The bail is being attended to," the lawyer deftly inserted, before Caltrop could reply.

"I was asking Sam, Pencil. You shut up! How about it, Sam?"

"It—it is being attended to," was Caltrop's reply.

"He's lying," declared Mac Kergow.

"I think so, too," concurred his comrade. " Caltrop, you haven't any intention of raising that bail. You're going to let those fellows stay in jail!"

" And why not?" demanded Caltrop, stung to irritation. " It's all their own fault! If Bushong and Chavez and Flint and you two hadn't seen fit to get drunk and saddle the whole job on Tresawna, one-half of your outfit wouldn't be in jail!"

" Getting drunk is our own business, old-timer," said Piper. " There was no great rush about it. If anybody's to blame, it's Andy, but that's no reason why he should stay in jail any more than the other two."

" Loose talk, loose talk!" struck in the lawyer. " We're not getting anywhere. As bail for those three boys is all you want, and as you've been told it's being attended to, we will no longer detain you."

" There is a little more," said Piper. " We want five hundred apiece to leave the country."

" You won't get it!" exclaimed Caltrop.

" Leave this to me, Sam," said the lawyer sharply. " And I don't want to tell you again to lower that bull bellow of yours. You must remember that this town is inhabited. Tex, don't you think your demands are a trifle excessive?"

Piper wagged his bullet head.

" Not at all! If you think it would be cheaper to have me go to the judge, just say so."

" I imagine you won't risk the judge. You'd only get yourselves in jail. Besides, Piper, I know enough about you and Kergow this minute to set you to making bridles for life."

Piper looked a little startled. Kergow's heavy features did not move a muscle.

" Yes," continued the lawyer placidly. " Do you and Mac recall riding out of Farewell on the 15th of last November and returning on the 2nd of December? Would you like me to mention where you went?"

" Damn your soul!" blazed Piper in a fierce whisper. " If I thought you wouldn't keep your mouth shut, I'd settle you here and now!"

" If you were capable of thought," drawled the lawyer, staring calmly into the muzzle of Piper's six-shooter, " you would realize that what I know is written legibly on legal cap and folded neatly within an envelope, said envelope resting in my safe-deposit box in the First National of Piegan City. In the event of my death otherwise than by disease or old age, my executors will open that envelope and—act accordingly. How many cards, Mr. Piper?"

" None," said Piper shortly, and put away his gun. " I quit!"

" Not yet," said the lawyer. " You'll play your hand out. I have a little work for you to do. I wish that you and Mac would—"

" But what do you know about them?" inquired Caltrop, when Piper and Kergow had taken their departure.

" Not a thing," replied Pencil Yandle.

" Huh? Then how—"

" You see, I merely happened to discover that they left town on the 15th of November and returned on the 2nd of December with enough money not only to pay their outstanding bills, but to lose about a thousand dollars apiece at poker. Knowing them, it was a comparatively easy matter to add two and two and total considerably more than four. You will find, Sam, that a strong bluff, assisted by the evil conscience of the bluffee, will work nine times out of ten."

" Then why didn't you work it sooner? You could have saved me the money you had to pay for their testimony."

The lawyer shook his head.

" I never play a trump card unless it's absolutely necessary; and don't harbor the notion that this card is to cost you nothing. I used it in order to have your little job of work completed to your satisfaction. You'll be charged my regular fee, old-timer!"

XIX

" SEE Sam and his new beard this morning, Bill?" asked Buff, coming upon his cousin where he was restringing his saddle behind Lainey's Hotel.

" In town, huh?" grinned Bill Holliday, sinking a string into the wool lining with meticulous care. " Did he see you?"

" Not with both eyes. The left one is still closed."

" Just about a week, ain't it? Joe said he'd be in bed that long."

Buff nodded.

" Looks like he must have mighty important business, to come to town with those shiners for folks to see!"

" It's a wonder you wouldn't find out what his business is."

" I did—that is, I found out who he had business with. It was Pencil Yandle, the slippery juniper!"

"I wonder!" said Bill meaningly, reaching for a concho and threading the string through the slots. "I wonder!"

"I'm wondering, too. I'm betting it's the Fairs. He ain't worrying his head about those three young hopefuls in the calaboose."

"Not twenty-five thousand dollars' worth—that's a cinch."

Buff squatted down on his heels and began to roll a cigarette.

"Now there's an odd number," he said presently. "I just saw two pair of boots go into Yandle's back door."

"Huh?"

"Look yonder. There's Yandle's house, beyond that covered wagon. You can see the sill and part of the back door under the reach. Those two pair of boots came round the corner of the house and went into the kitchen."

"The soup is getting thicker!"

"Especially when one pair of boots belongs to Tex Piper."

"Those red ones, huh?"

"The only pair of that color in town. It's a safe bet Mac's legs are in the other pair. I think a little pepper in the soup would improve the flavor. Let's go sit in that patch of brush behind the corral—then we can see the whole of Yandle's back door."

For the space of half an hour they abode patiently in the patch of brush. Then came their reward in the shape of Tex Piper's hatless head stealthily poking out from the door. Evidently the deserted prospect pleased the man, for he appeared in full fig almost immediately, followed by Mac Kergow. The two hard cases filtered around the corner of the house and vanished streetward.

"I'd sure like to know what those two devils are up to now!" said Bill, getting to his feet.

"Whatever it is," returned Buff, following Bill's example, "I'm glad Kergow is in it. He's such a buffle-headed bull calf, it will make it easier to bust him."

They strolled back to where Holliday's saddle lay, and Bill resumed his labors. Buff departed, with the intention of circulating through the saloons and other places of business and keeping an eye on Piper and Kergow.

Buff stopped in the hotel kitchen for a handful of matches, and passed into the dining room on his way to the street. Then he changed his course, lounged over to a window, and sat down on the sill; for Tex Piper and Mac Kergow were filing upstairs to the second story.

As he sat looking out into the street, he could hear them tramping about in their room. He heard the loud voice of Mac Kergow swearing over a shirt that had disappeared. He could not catch Tex Piper's remarks.

Then, suddenly, he heard Piper's voice plainly. The door of their room, shut after they entered, must have been quietly opened.

"It's a good thing we had 'em shod," Piper was saying. "The Bend road both sides of Cutter is almighty rocky."

It would seem, then, that the two adventurers were riding to Paradise Bend, a lively town some two hundred miles north of Farewell; but Buff understood that with such men it is always well to look deeper than the surface.

"I wish I had cantinas," said Kergow. "I can't get all my stuff in the saddle pockets."

"Tie what you got extra in your slicker, you jack," advised Piper. "That's plenty good enough till we get to the Bend. We ain't ridin' around the world."

There it was again — "the Bend." It was becoming increasingly evident that Mr. Piper wished the listener to know where he and his comrade were going. They had seen Buff seat himself on the window sill—he was sure of that.

Lainey, coming into the dining room at this juncture, cocked a listening ear.

"Looks like Tex and Mac were leaving. They ain't paid their bill yet, neither."

The fat man waddled upstairs. Buff decided to rejoin Bill at the corral. He thought it as well to be on hand when Piper and his friend caught up their horses —this in order to give the strangely communicative Piper every chance to spread himself.

Buff did not leave the window immediately, however, for Yandle had just come into view. The lawyer was crossing the street toward the sheriff's office. While Buff remained at gaze, he entered the office and closed the door.

When Tex Piper and Mac Kergow, carrying their packed saddles, blankets, and rifles, appeared at the corral, they found Buff leaning against the stockade and watching Bill stringing a saddle. Both men gave the two deputies a civil good morning, and dropped their gear near the gate. While Kergow with his bridle went into the corral, Piper paused to roll a cigarette.

"I hope I never see this town again!" he remarked.

"As bad as that?" was Buff's comment.

"Worse! A man hasn't any chance here. The country's dead, and without capital in the cow business a man might as well be dead, too. Mac and I, we're dragging it to see what Paradise Bend looks like."

"In a business way?" was Buff's query.

"In a business way. What other way do you think?"

"I didn't know, and I was wondering. No offense, Tex!"

"Putting it that way, sure not," said Tex readily. "I wish you'd do me a favor, Buff. I'm expecting an important letter this month some time. I went to the post office to tell Calloway to forward it, and he was out, so I told his wife instead. Now you know how women folks are — they'd forget their heads if they weren't sewed on their necks right tight. I'd be obliged if you'd tell Calloway for me yourself, and then there sure won't be any mistake. It's a right important letter, or I wouldn't bother you."

"No bother, Tex. I'll do it. You want it care of anybody, or just the Bend?"

"Just the Bend, Buff."

Piper stooped for his bridle, and went into the corral to catch up his horse.

When the two men had led out, saddled, and gone on their way, Buff smiled without mirth.

"He couldn't let well enough alone!" he said.

"The letter business was using a shovel, all right," said Bill.

"Sounds like the sheriff coming," remarked Buff.

It was the sheriff.

"I wish, Buff," said Mack, when he had come within speaking distance, "that you and Bill would traipse over to the Sweetwater country and see is everything all right with my claims. I'm kind of wondering whether somebody's jumped 'em or not. You know where they lie—in a row on the south face of the mountain, under the quartzite pinnacle—don't you? Yeah, well, you better start now. Take my pack outfit. Get what you need from the Blue Pigeon, and I'll voucher it."

"Good enough!" said Buff.

The sheriff nodded and withdrew. Buff winked impishly at Bill.

"The soup is getting thicker and thicker!" he observed.

"Like the sheriff's head, if he expects to take anybody in with that yarn about folks wanting to jump his Sweetwater claims. Shucks, you couldn't give those worn-out prospects of his away with a pound of coffee!"

"I expect Yandle thinks any old tale to get us out of the way is good enough."

"Somehow it don't seem like Joe could take orders from slippery Pencil."

"Suggestions, not orders, Bill. Joe is a cowman. He'll do about anything he legally can to put the kibosh on nesters. Joe ain't actually crooked, you understand, but he's not asking any questions when it comes to what Sam or Yandle want done; and if he can discredit us in any way, he'll jump at the chance."

"He's taking things quiet enough."

"He's a good poker player, Joe is. He's been easy as an old shoe with us, and acts like he's making the best of losing his bet, but don't you think for a minute he ain't the cat at the rat hole. I know Joe from 'way back. Tell you, Bill, don't be in any hurry with those last two strings. We want to dawdle around like we would ordinarily on a no-account job like this. Even if the sheriff hadn't horned in on us, I wasn't intending to pull out under half an hour. I want to give Tex and Mac a good start."

"We don't want to give 'em too much of a start," said Bill.

"You leave it to your uncle. He knows what he's doing. I'll be back in a minute. I'm going over to the sheriff's, to borrow his field glasses."

"How about stocking up the grub, then, while you catch up the pack horse?"

"I'll get the grub after I get the glasses. We're *both* going to catch up the pack horse."

"Why the two of us?" grumbled Bill.

Buff wouldn't tell him why, and went off to get the field glasses and the food. The sheriff made no bones about lending the glasses. He seemed to think it a wise provision on Buff's part.

At the end of half an hour Buff returned to the corral with an armful of provisions, which he halved.

"Stick your half in your saddle pockets, Bill," he said.

" What's the pack horse for?" demanded the mystified Bill.

" For something else," was the unsatisfactory explanation. " I'll catch up your horse while you're finishing that last string."

Within ten minutes the cousins were in the saddle and trotting toward the sheriff's horse pasture. It being necessary for the sheriff to have his horses ready to hand, he could not allow his string to run out on the flats with those of other members of the community. Instead, he had put two hundred acres under fence.

The pasture gate was a few rods beyond the corral. As the deputies passed the corral, the sheriff's racer nickered in friendly fashion.

" Good old horse!" chuckled Bill.

" The sheriff's horses are sure a great help. The pack horse is, special."

" How is he, if we ain't going to pack him?"

" You'll see. That's him yonder in the swag. We'll drift him along toward the southeast corner."

They drove the pack horse unhurriedly, keeping out of sight in the swag until they came to a grove of trees. They crossed into the grove, and rode down into a wide draw leading in the desired direction. At the corner Buff dismounted, laid hands on a fence post, and pulled it out of the ground. Three more posts he served in similar fashion.

" Ain't it amazing what a horse will do to a fence when he wants to get out?" said Buff, when the posts and wires were flat on the ground. " You'd never believe he'd pull all these posts up, would you? Chouse him over, Bill!"

" I wonder will the sheriff believe it," said Bill, as he obliged.

" Not if we put the posts back," returned Buff.

He led his horse across the wires and proceeded, with the assistance of Bill, to set the posts upright.

" He won't come snooping around unless he gets suspicious," went on Buff, topping his mount. " He ain't suspicious yet, and by the time he is we'll be far, far away, trailing this valuable pack animal."

" Did you think all this up out of your own head, Buff?"

Buff nodded.

" Ain't he clever? So young, too! If you were a couple of horse thieves, like Piper and Mac, which way would you go to the Fair place?"

" Those draws west of Indian Ridge."

" And that brings you out on the short-grass country between Soogan Creek and Long Coulee. You can watch 'most all that country from the hill northwest of Moccasin Spring. From the south side of the hill you can see the Fair place. What's fairer than that?"

" You think they're going to run the Fairs off?" said Bill, ignoring the atrocious pun.

" You just come to life? It's about time. Sure I think so! It's as plain as the long nose on your dish face."

" You leave my nose alone. We've lived together a good many years, and never had a cross word; but about Tex and Mac you may be right. You sometimes are."

" I am this time, anyway. They'll ride the short-grass country, you'll see."

" They may swing farther west—ride the other side of Soogan Creek. Then you won't be able to see 'em," said Bill, who felt it incumbent upon him to dash his cousin's cocksureness, if he could.

" Wring out that wet blanket, brother! Tex Piper ain't the man to ride two miles when he can get there just as safe and easy by riding one. Besides, Chuck Morgan, Mis' Dale, and Red Kane run their cattle west of Soogan. Either Chuck or Red, or both, are sure to be over there this time of year. Tex and Mac ain't going to run the risk of meeting anybody, are they? Well, then!"

Bill, discomfited, changed the subject.

" Who's that yonder?"

" That " was a rider topping a ridge a mile and a half to the east.

" Grullo horse, looks to be," said Buff.

" Tex was riding a brown and Mac a red sorrel. This fellah—"

" Ain't one of them, but he's heading for Fair's straighter than we are! When he's behind the hill, we'll ride over that way. I'm curious about anybody riding to the Fair place!"

Before changing their direction, thinking to play safe, they waited ten minutes after the stranger's disappearance behind the ridge. Then, picking up the hoofprints on the side of the ridge, they followed them over the top. By rights the horseman should have been still in sight. He wasn't; but the hoofprints of the horse were.

" Shod horse—all around," said Bill.

"The son of a gun!" exclaimed Buff. "See where he turned his horse around, soon as he was over the top, and watched us from behind that clump of buckbush!"

"Yeah, and look at his tracks here. He sure went off the hill a flying!"

Buff at once thought of the Twisted Foot. In tune with his plan to shield Gilian at all hazards, he had made not the slightest mention to Bill of his experience with the arch criminal.

"Guess we'll follow these tracks a ways," said Buff.

The tracks led them at a right angle to the former line of march.

"He's changed his mind about going to the Fair place," said Bill, after half an hour, "if he ever was going there."

"Looks that way. He's heading for the breaks west of the Bar S ranch house as fast as he can travel. We might as well go on back. No use running our horses down for nothing."

Bill turned his horse.

"Wonder who he is!"

"Some old boy on the dodge," said Buff, in a tone considerably more careless than his thoughts.

The fleeing man might not be the Twisted Foot. Still—

They reached the hill northwest of Moccasin Spring without seeing any one. On the flat top of the hill they staked out their horses and hobbled the pack horse. In the long grass at the edge of the hill they themselves lay down to watch the back trail.

After a time, Bill, growing tired of watching, rolled over on his back, pulled his hat over his face, and went to sleep. Buff did not doze. Either with the field glasses or without, he never ceased to watch the short-grass country.

As the hours dragged on, he was forced to spur his belief that the two men would eventually come into sight. For what other purpose had they gone to the meeting with Caltrop and Yandle? Their furtive manner of leaving the house, their actions at the corral, what Piper had said, all pointed to one thing—some deviltry against the Fairs. Besides, he knew Caltrop—knew the stubborn nature that would have its desires, come hell or high water.

But suppose Tex and his friend were traveling another route, as Bill had suggested! Suppose they were already at the Fair place, engaged in God knew what! The hair bristled on the back of Buff's neck. He half rose. Piper and Kergow were capable of anything—all Farewell knew that.

As he thought of these things, Buff saw Gilian's face. He resolved to leave at once, and to free his jumping mind of these uncertainties. He turned to rouse Bill, but Bill was awake and watching him.

"Discouraged, huh?" said Bill, with startling insight. "I told you they'd ride west of Soogan!"

"They're late," admitted Buff.

"Two to one they ain't thinking of going to the Fairs'," pursued Bill, seizing his advantage. "You want to tighten the curb strap on your imagination, Buff. Bad business letting it run away with you!"

"Is that so?" said Buff, lying down again for a last look. "Is—that—so?"

A moment later he handed the glasses to Bill.

"Have a look. See what you make of what's by the little old hill over yonder."

Bill slowly turned the eyepieces to the correct focus.

"It's them," he conceded. "Leastways, it's their colored horses; but you never can tell. Maybe it's Red Kane and Chuck Morgan."

"Maybe it's *Jack Spratt* and the man in the moon," Buff remarked with contempt. "Here's where we drift!"

"Bushwhack 'em?"

"That wouldn't be legal. We're deputies, and have to do everything according to law, Bill."

"Oh, I didn't mean kill 'em plumb dead," was Bill's naïve explanation. "Just smoke 'em up some."

"And have the job to do all over again later? Have sense, William. I want to arrest 'em."

"But they ain't done anything yet."

"They will."

"I believe in shooting first. This business of holding off till the other fellow ventilates you plenty is too rich for my blood!"

"It won't come to that."

"You don't know," asserted Bill, with gloom. "You'll be getting us killed with your finickiness. You needn't jabber about being legal, either. Be as legal as you please, but I ain't taking a chance on those two reptiles!"

"And make it harder for the Fairs?" Buff struck in swiftly, coiling his rope.

Bill tossed up despairing hands.

"I surrender! Have it your own way;

but I swear, if you get me erased in this fracas, I'll haunt you!"

XX

THEY approached the Fair place from the east, so that Tex and Mac might not be so likely to cut their track and grow wary. As they rode, they cut the track of another horse coming from the east—a shod horse traveling at a sharp trot.

"These tracks ain't a half hour old," said Bill.

Buff nodded.

"They're about the size of that grullo's."

"Sure must have hit a wicket to get here ahead of us!"

"Maybe he had reason."

"If he's at the Fairs', we'll find out who he is," said Bill. "You go this way, and I'll ride round and come in from the river side."

"No!" vetoed Buff, in a panic. "We'll stay together."

He wanted to catch the Twisted Foot, but not at the Fair place—anywhere but there!

Bill glanced curiously at Buff. What was the matter with Buff? Why didn't he want to do what was obviously essential in order to discover the identity of the grullo's rider? It couldn't be that Buff was afraid to go in alone. Bill knew his relative better than that. What was it, then?

They rode on in silence. Rising a low swell, they saw, a mile and a half away, the light green foliage and silvering trunks of the cottonwoods lining the banks of the Lazy, and, through gaps, the cool sheen of the river itself. They could not see the Fair buildings, because of a knoll lying directly in their path. The tracks of the shod horse led straight toward this knoll.

They followed the trail up the side of the knoll. When they topped it, they could see the gray-brown log-and-shake shacks and pole stockade that were the Fair stables and corral, roosting on the eastern end of a short ridge, under whose western shoulder lay the long log house.

"He's going there, all right," muttered Buff miserably.

If the man were the Twisted Foot, he would have to take him—he would have to, no matter what the consequences to the Fairs.

"Wonder what Fair put a flagpole on his stable for!" said Bill, shading his eyes with his hand.

Buff had been more absorbed in the horse tracks, and what they portended, than in paying attention to any improvements on the stables; but now he stared. It looked like a very thick flagpole stuck up there on the roof of the nearest stable. There was a puffiness about it that did not coincide with his idea of what a flagpole should be.

Suddenly the pole moved across the roof and sank quickly from sight. A moment later they saw it twinkling along the ridge toward the house.

"There's your flagpole, Bill!"

"Going to warn the fellow on the grullo," grumbled Bill. "I tell you flat, Buff, I'm beginning to be suspicious of these Fairs!"

Buff made no comment. Under the circumstances, there was none that he could make.

"What did I tell you?" Bill exclaimed in triumph, less than a minute later, as a man riding a grullo flashed into sight for an instant between the ranch house and the cottonwoods. "These Fairs are a fine bunch! For all you know, they may have rustled every head they own."

"You're jumping at conclusions," was Buff's weak parry.

"When a conclusion hits me bang in the eye, I don't need to jump at it. You don't act like you wanted to see anything wrong, Buff."

"I've got to be sure first," defended Buff. "The fellow on a grullo may be just in a hurry to get somewhere."

"You think so, huh? Go to the head of the class! What a bright child our Buff is! You make me sick! I tell you there's something wrong about these Fairs. Bet you ten they'll say nobody has been here—least of all anybody with a grullo!"

"It's a bet," replied Buff, although he knew as well as he knew his own name that Bill would win.

"And you can ask 'em yourself," Bill added.

"I will," agreed Buff.

Gilian met them at the door of the ranch house. She gave Buff greeting calmly. He introduced her to Bill Holliday. The latter reddened, in memory of the incident at the Eighty-Eight. Gilian acknowledged the introduction as if she had never seen him before.

"Anybody been here lately, Miss Fair?" inquired Buff, his eyes on hers.

"No," said she, giving him look for look, as if she was the most truthful person in the world.

To Buff, who had already discounted Gilian's denial of the coming and going of the man on the grullo, the actual utterance of the lie was no shock. The poor girl had to lie. That the man whose visit she denied was the Twisted Foot was now as certain as it was terrible. There were discrepancies in the grounds for this belief, of course; but—there you are. That little word of three letters has lynched more men than all the hard-working hangmen have hung since time began.

"We're looking for a couple of fellows," said Buff slowly, "and—howdy, Mis' Fair? Shake hands with my cousin here, Bill Holliday. We both got deputies' jobs now. I was just asking your daughter if anybody had been here lately."

He did not miss the look of fear that came into the eyes of the two women at the word "deputies." Both men were wearing their stars under their vests.

"Why, no," was Mrs. Fair's reply. "Nobody has been here since you left—not a soul. Jemima, you don't remember anybody coming here since Mr. Warren went away, do you?"

"No," came in Jemima's clear young voice, "I don't. Hello, Buff! I'll be out in a minute. I'm building a deep dish pie right now, and I can't leave it. If mother doesn't ask you to step in for a bite pretty soon, I will."

"The invitation was on the tip of my tongue," said Mrs. Fair, with her pleasant smile. "If you'll unsaddle, supper will be ready very soon."

"We wouldn't care for any just now, thanks," said Buff.

He did not miss the deepening shadow in the eyes of both women.

"Oh, you must stop!" Mrs. Fair urged hastily.

"You'll travel all the better for a meal," added Gilian.

"We're going to stop, all right. I only meant we won't have time to eat," Buff told her.

He noted that the eyes of both women brightened at once. He went on to explain, without mentioning any names, his purpose in coming.

"This is very good of you," Mrs. Fair said, when he had done. "It seems that you make us more indebted to you every day. What are you going to do?"

"Put our three horses in the stable. I'll hide out in the open shed next to it, where I can watch three sides of the ridge. Bill will find him a good thick place in the cottonwoods along the river bank. It will make it a lot easier for us if you people will stay in the house. If you hear any shooting, don't be scared—just lie down on the floor."

"What did I tell you?" began Bill with a savage sneer, when they were alone. "That girl—"

"Don't say it, Bill!" interrupted Buff. "I'm going to marry that girl some day."

Bill gazed at him.

"You mean it?"

"I sure do!"

"Well, all I got to say, it's your funeral. Another good man gone! Shucks, Buff, I thought you were just fooling. I never took you serious. You ain't the marrying kind."

"I will be," said Buff briefly, thonging his holster to his leg.

"Lemme tell you something, young fellah," protested his relative. "You got the wrong idea. You don't need a wife. You need a long term in the insane asylum!"

"Aw, shut up!"

"I'm tryin' to save your life, you jack! That girl—Buff, she's fine-looking, and nice as pie, too, I'll bet—*now;* but marry her, and what happens? It 'll be 'Buffy this' and 'Buffy that,' till you can't rest. She'll haze you around. She'll want the wood chopped a month ahead. She won't let you touch a card. She'll make you take off your boots in the house, and wear slippers. She'll stop your smoking. You'll have to go outdoors to spit. You won't dare take a drink, or even cuss. She—she"—his tone sank to a horrified whisper—"she'll give you *religion!*"

"Won't that be great?" exclaimed Buff. "Then we'll come around and convert you, Billyum!"

"Like hell!" snarled the unregenerate William. "You'll stay away from me—that's what you'll do! If you're so dead set on making a fool of yourself, I won't argue with you any more; but I'm here to say I don't understand it, and you'll regret it, and so'll she. Me personal, if I was a girl, I wouldn't marry you on a bet—no, sir! Oh, all right, all right! I said I wouldn't argue with you any more, didn't I? What you yowlin' about?"

Throughout the rest of the day Buff waited and watched in the shed. No one came near him. He had given orders against that. The sun beat down on the shed and made it an oven. Buff, perspiring, unbuttoned his shirt, and alleviated his comfortless condition with many cigarettes.

Of the men whom he expected he saw not a sign—until the sun had set. Then, in the dusk, a shadow detached itself from the shadows of trees and what not at the foot of the ridge, and crept up the slope toward the sheds and stables.

Buff, knowing how in partial darkness even a sunburned skin gathers light, smeared his features with a light coating of black grease from one of the hubs of the wagon beside which he was crouching. Being a thorough person, he treated even his hands in similar fashion. All the while he watched, through a crack, the shadow slipping up the rise toward his shed.

At twenty yards Buff knew that the shadow was Tex Piper. He seemed to be carrying a six-shooter in one hand and a can in the other. A can! Why a can?

As Tex came closer, the crack no longer served its purpose. Buff crawled noiselessly toward the rectangle of grayness that was the front of the shed. Within arm's length of the open air he rose to his feet, and, using infinite caution, flattened himself into the angle between the wall of the stable and a twelve-inch log serving as a roof prop. Here he stood, straining his ears, scarcely breathing, his drawn six-shooter in his hand.

For a while he heard no sound. No doubt Tex was likewise waiting and listening. Then the padlock on the hasp of the stable door clinked faintly. Buff blessed the forethought that had caused him to obviate all risk of arousing the suspicious natures of the two worthies by a discovery of official horses where official horses should not be.

A rustling—feet stepping softly. Tex was coming toward the shed. A dark bulk against the grayness. Tex was standing in the open front of the shed—standing and looking toward the other end of the ridge, behind which lay the house. Buff could have stretched out an arm and touched the intruder, or batted the fellow over the head with the barrel of his six-shooter, if he had wished.

But he did not wish — yet. Standing under a shed in a listening attitude is not an action for which one may convict a man. It was necessary to let Tex go, not too far, but far enough to enable an officer of the law to put him where the wicked cease from troubling and the jailer is a pest.

Tex turned and looked into the shed. It seemed to Buff that he must be seen. Tex, peering, had looked straight at him. The deputy held his breath, and his fingers stiffened on the butt of his six-shooter.

Then Tex stepped noiselessly past him into the shed, and vanished in the darkness of the interior. Buff heard him feeling his way along behind the wagon. There was silence for a spell. Then came scraping sounds, and the rank smell of kerosene.

This was what the can had signified! Although Buff had counted on fire as one of the methods that would probably be employed to get rid of the Fairs, he had not counted on such a medium as kerosene. He cursed himself for a blind fool not to have stayed at the back of the shed. The point where he stood was too far from the base of operations; but he did not dare to move. The slightest sound on his part would spoil everything.

He braced himself for the striking of the match. Then would be his opportunity, for the incendiary would be temporarily blinded by the flare so close to his face, while Buff, being farther away, would not be so affected.

Tex made a little sound in setting down the can. He would light the match now, Buff thought; but he did not. He stood quite still. What was he waiting for?

What was Kergow doing? At any rate, he could not come to the house without being seen by Bill. There was sound, solid comfort in that thought.

Suddenly a shot sounded from the flat beyond the river—then another, and another—five in all, apparently from a six-shooter. Then came a louder crack, followed by a ripple of shots. These were from a Winchester. Only by a supreme effort of will was Buff enabled to hold himself against the wall. He could hear a confusion of cries from the direction of the house, but he did not budge. What was happening on the flat was Bill's business; his own work lay with Tex.

Still there was no sound from Tex. Within the shed there was the silence of the grave. It might well be a grave before the job was finished!

The shooting on the flat continued. Another rifle chimed in—Bill's rifle. Buff recognized the heavy bark of the forty-five-ninety cartridge. The other man was using a gun of smaller caliber.

Scra-a-tch! Tex's match flashed alight on the tire of the wagon wheel. Buff leaped at him and struck—struck short. A six-shooter spat flame in his face. Burning powder grains stung his cheek. A knee struck him heavily in the thigh.

He grabbed the wrist of Tex's gun hand, twisted it upward, and tried to backheel and run over his adversary. In this he was only partly successful. The two men, leg-locked and arm-locked—for Tex had seized Buff's right wrist even as his own had been seized — toppled sidewise against the wagon, whose bed was now finely ablaze.

"You damned nigger!" grunted Tex.

Buff, if the moment had not been so serious, would have laughed. As it was, he had much ado to keep Tex from swinging him sidewise into the flames, which were licking over the sideboards. The balked Tex snapped at Buff like a dog. Buff smacked Tex on cheek and chin with his forehead, thereby causing the other man to bite his own cheek.

Mouthing a curse, Tex strove by a sudden jerk to break Buff's hold and spring away, but Buff stayed with him, and found opportunity to give him the knee. For an instant Tex weakened, and his weakness endured long enough for Buff to roll him backward over his hip and jam him into the flames of the burning wagon.

With a yelp of mingled pain and dismay, Tex let go Buff's right wrist. Buff swung his six-shooter in a twinkling arc, and struck Tex under the left ear. The man collapsed in a heap.

His clothing was beginning to burn. Buff smothered the incipient blaze by rolling him in the dirt. Then he dragged the senseless man out of the shed, dumped him at one side, and jumped to the tongue of the burning wagon.

He ran the wagon out of the building, and sprang back within, to extinguish the fire, which had now spread to the wall and was licking up at the roof. With handfuls of dirt and a gunny sack he smothered and beat out the crawling flames, and within five minutes the fire in the shed was out.

Buff went outside, and turned his attention to the blazing wagon. This was a different proposition, however, for the vehicle was well alight from the end gate to the seat, and the heat was so great that he could not approach within ten feet.

"They needed that wagon, too," he said to himself.

An idea struck him. He knelt beside the unconscious Tex, and proceeded to search him. In one pocket was a heavy leather poke. This he dropped into the inside pocket of his own vest. In another pocket he discovered a handful of silver. This joined the poke. A pocket knife and a few personal odds and ends he returned intact.

He was on his feet, and swabbing the grease from his face with a handkerchief, when Gilian, followed by Jemima and all the rest of the family except Mr. Fair, panted into the circle of firelight. Not till then did it occur to Buff that the firing out on the flat had ceased.

XXI

"I WAS sitting there in the willows on this side of the river," said Bill, "when I heard the first shot out on the flat, where the cattle are. I got across as quick as I could, and began firing at the flashes of the fellow's gun."

"Did you hit him?" asked Gilian.

"I don't know, ma'am. He went away. He got two heifers before he went, though."

"Two heifers!" cried Mrs. Fair, aghast.

"Yes, ma'am, but they ain't a total loss," said the capable Bill. "I got to 'em and cut their throats before they died on you complete. They bled fine. If you'll lend us a lantern, Buff and I'll butcher 'em for you, so you'll have the meat and hides, anyway."

"And if you don't want all the meat, Mis' Fair," said Buff, "we'll pack it in town for you and sell it to Bill Lainey or the Canton. They're always on the lookout for beef. They'll pay six or seven cents a pound."

"You're very kind," said Mrs. Fair faintly. She had never ceased to be astonished by the Western ability to turn an apparent mishap to good purpose. "We don't want to bother you too much. We—"

"Don't say a word, ma'am," interrupted Buff. "It's no trouble for us at all. You leave it to Bill and me. If you'll get us that lantern while we're handcuffing Tex Piper to this post, we'll be obliged. We better borrow your other wagon, too. Two heifers makes quite a lot of beef."

"He's comin' to, Buff," said Bill.

Buff nodded.

"About time!"

Tex rolled to one side and tried to sit up. The chain of the handcuffs around the post jerked him down. He swore with pain.

"It 'll all come back to you in a minute," said Buff.

Tex squinted at the two dark forms revealed by the light of the lantern set on the ground near his feet. He swore again —in surprise, this time.

"I thought you were going to Paradise Bend," said Buff gently; "and I guess you thought we were going to the Sweetwater country, didn't you?"

Tex Piper was understood to damn everybody.

"I expect so," assented Buff. "It's a wicked world. Ain't it amazing what bad luck Mr. Yandle has had with his handy little helpers lately? Here's Chavez and George Bushong in jail already, and here's you, Mr. Piper, all set for a nice long term, too!"

"You're a liar!" snarled Piper. "I'll be out in a week!"

Buff shook his head.

"I doubt it. You know what the law is about arson, Tex. Setting fire in the night time to any barn, stall, outhouse, or other building situated within one hundred yards of any dwelling house is punished by imprisonment in the county jail or Territorial prison for not more than fifteen years, nor less than ten."

"You'll never convict me!" grunted Piper.

"The jury will do that. You might get an easier sentence, Tex, if you'd favor us with a few well chosen remarks. Who tempted you to take your match in hand?"

"You go to hell!"

"Well, all right, if you feel that way about it. Too bad you aren't Kergow! He wouldn't have such tender scruples. Here, I'll unlock you. You'll be more comfortable sitting up straight."

But unlocking the handcuffs did not render Piper at all comfortable. He sat up, it is true, but immediately fell to searching his pockets with frantic haste.

"Looking for the makings?" suggested Buff. "Here—take mine."

"Damn the makings!" yapped Piper distractedly. "My money's gone—all of it! You took it, one of you!"

"You think so? Well, you may be right; but what of it? You won't need money where you're going. Board, lodging, medicine, and even your—er—burial will be paid for by the Territory. I can't see what you got to complain of. Can you, Bill?"

"I should say not!"

But Tex would not be comforted.

"I want my money!" he insisted. "You ain't got any right to rob me this way!"

"Rob you? Shucks, Tex, you don't mean those harsh words! That money, two hundred and sixty-eight dollars, is what you're giving the Fairs to make up for the damage you did. They'll need a new wagon. There were two sets of harness and some odds and ends in the wagon, and they got burned up, too. Naturally you'll want to make good. I told Mrs. Fair that when I gave her the money."

"If you don't give me that money I'll put you in the pen! We'll see if the law allows you to rob a prisoner! By Gawd, you get that money back for me instanter!"

"You sure you want it, Tex?"

"You bet I do, and I'm going to have it, too!"

"I suppose I got to get it for you, then," Buff said, with a heavy sigh. "I don't want to be put in the pen; but all the same I'm kind of sorry for you, Tex. Those five extra years are a heap likely to be slow and gloomersome!"

"Huh?" Thus the startled Tex.

"But you'll maybe be used to it by that time. They say the first ten are always the hardest."

"What do you mean by those five extra years?" worried Tex.

"Oh, nothing, nothing! Don't bother your head about 'em. I can stand it if you can."

"Look here, I want to know what you mean, damn it all! Why will I get those five extra years?"

"Well, you see, Tex," Buff said apologetically, "resisting an officer is two years in the pen, and for a prisoner to try to escape is three years more."

"I only wrastled you around when you hopped on me," Tex pointed out.

"I'm not talking about that. A fellow's allowed to fight before he's taken prisoner. Leastways, I don't know anything different; but what I mean is *now,* after you're a prisoner and all. Then you haven't any right to fight and try to escape, see?"

"But I ain't fightin', and I ain't tryin' to escape!" was Tex Piper's bewildered exclamation.

"Yes, you are, too," contradicted Buff wearidly. "You're clawing at Bill and me something ferocious. We're having a hard time with you. It's all we can do to hold you. There now! You've knocked Bill down."

"Why me?" demanded Bill.

"You've knocked Bill down twice," continued Buff, regardless of the interruption. "You're running down the hill fast as you can leg it. Look, yonder, Tex! You can almost see yourself, can't you? And see me—I'm right behind you. I catch you down by the river and fetch you back. No harm done, except to Bill, who will limp into court to-morrow most pitiful, and swear to the story I'll tell the judge, who'll give you five years more on the strength of it. Of course you won't mind a little thing like that. You'll have your two hundred sixty-eight dollars to comfort you."

"But that will be perjury!" wailed the horrified Tex.

"Yes, indeed, but how you going to prove it?"

"It's illegal!"

"Perjury usually is; but we'll be doing it for your sake, Tex, and that 'll take the curse off."

Tex glared at Buff in a dumb rage. Buff smiled upon him—the kind of a smile you bestow upon an interesting monkey in a cage. Tex started to speak, then gulped instead.

"Might as well slam the door, Tex," said Buff. "The tooth has got to come out some time."

"All right!" groaned Tex, who felt as if he were losing not one tooth, but many. "She—they can have the money."

Buff bowed his acknowledgment.

"God bless you, Tex Piper, and make you a better boy!"

XXII

"Why, of course everything is all right, Sam," encouraged Yandle, leaning back in his desk chair and locking hands over his well filled stomach. "Tex and Mac will be in pretty soon to report the job completed to your satisfaction."

"They should have been back before this," worried Caltrop; "early this morning, anyway."

"I expect they were delayed."

"Maybe Buff and Bill—"

"Rats! Those two jacks are over in the Sweetwater country."

"I know you told me they were going, all right, but—"

"Oh, go home and sit by the fire! A man as nervous as you are hasn't any right to wear pants."

"It's all very well for you to be cheerful. You've got nothing to lose; but I tell you I know this Buff Warren, and he's bad medicine."

"That may be, but he isn't clever. I am. I flatter myself that I'm a match for a dozen ignorant punchers!"

"You're always flattering yourself."

"What you need is cheering up. We'll have a little drink and go over and see the sheriff."

"I see they didn't take your pack, sheriff," remarked Yandle, eying the outfit piled in a corner of the office.

"And that's a funny thing, too," said the sheriff. "They took the horse."

"I knew it!" broke in Caltrop. "Something's up!"

"You needn't tell me," the sheriff intervened hastily. "What I don't officially know—"

"Won't hurt your conscience," Yandle sneered. "You needn't tell us, either. We all know that conscience."

"Meaning?" the sheriff frowned.

"That we're all little thieves together. You can't throw any bluff with me, Joe. Don't try it!"

Joe considered.

"You're a poisonous reptile, Pencil!" he remarked. "I often wonder why I don't squash you out of hand!"

"Because you need me—that's why. Because I'm the only man with a brain in the whole town. Who else but the brilliant legal light, Mr. Attorney Yandle, could have planned this absolutely safe scheme for getting rid of these undesirable nesters at McFluke's? The sheriff, of course, is conscientiously incapable of formulating any plan savoring of illegality. We will not expect any comment from him. Mr. Caltrop, did you speak? You didn't? I thought you wouldn't. Phut-t! You two whited sepulchers make me sick! I do certainly like a man to have the courage of his convictions."

At this the sheriff smiled wryly. He had been looking out of the window.

"You want to take care of that courage, Pencil. You'll need every ounce of it soon and sudden."

"Why?" demanded Yandle.

"Look out the window."

The lawyer walked to the window. Caltrop was there as soon as he was. Even Yandle paled at the sight they saw.

Up the street came three horsemen, riding abreast. Tex Piper, his head bandaged, handcuffs on his wrists, rode the sheriff's pack horse, bareback, between the two deputies, Buff Warren and Bill Holliday.

It was Caltrop who struck the first blow, but it was the lawyer who, having neglected to wear his knife that morning, secured a wrestling hold and brought the combat to the floor in a scrambling rough and tumble.

The sheriff watched the broil with pleased eyes.

"For once, anyhow," he said aloud, "Pencil Yandle won't be able to say that Sam Caltrop didn't have the courage of his convictions!"

Sixty seconds later the sheriff regretfully wrenched the victorious ranchman from his seat astride the prostrate lawyer.

"Here! Let Pencil up!" he cried in Sam's furious ear. "Buff's bringing his prisoner in here! Get a holt of yourselves, and settle it later!"

The sheriff stood the vanquished lawyer upright.

"Help me dust him off, Sam. Quick! Bleed in your handkerchief, Pencil, not on the chair. There—that's better. Wipe your face, Sam. Sit down, both of you. Look like nothing was the matter."

The office door swung open.

"Go on in, Tex," said Buff. "Morning, gentlemen!" he added, sweeping the occupants of the room with a keen glance. "What's the matter, Pencil? You look the worse for wear."

"Nosebleed," replied the lawyer through his handkerchief.

"That's sure tough! You want to—"

"Got a prisoner, Buff?" struck in the sheriff, in brisk, businesslike tones. "Picked him up over in the Sweetwater, I suppose. I kind of thought those claims needed attention."

"We haven't been to the Sweetwater yet," replied Buff placidly. "Bill and I've been trailing your old pack horse ever since yesterday morning."

"I—er—I see," murmured the sheriff. "Wasn't the horse in the pasture?"

"He got out," explained Buff. "We just naturally followed him, and he sure led us a chase away over to McFluke's old place, where the Fair family located."

Sam Caltrop moved slightly in his chair. He looked up into the sardonic eyes of Buff Warren. The latter grinned, and tipped him an understanding wink.

Bill Holliday had sidled across the room, and now leaned against the wall at the ranchman's elbow. Sam, his nervous fingers twitching at his new beard, shifted his position slightly.

"Tex, he took the horse, I suppose," said the sheriff.

"Not exactly," Buff told him. "Tex comes in later. You see, we got into the Fair place kind of late, so we stayed there all night, and during the evening I ran across Tex setting fire to one of the sheds. He didn't do much damage to the shed, but a wagon and two sets of harness were burned up."

"Buff, he took—" Tex began snarling.

"How's your leg, Bill?" interrupted Buff. "Feel any better?"

"Not much," replied Bill. "Hurts pretty bad."

"Go on, Tex!" prompted Buff. "What were you starting to say?"

"Nothing," grunted Tex.

"Fair enough! As I was saying, Tex did his part all right—"

"I got to be going," mumbled Yandle, and started for the door.

"Wait! I ain't through yet." Buff headed him off, and casually leaned back against the door. "Better take a seat, Pencil."

"I'd like to know what right—" began the lawyer.

"No right," said Buff. "You're foot loose and fancy free—er—so far. Still, I'd sit down, if I were you."

The lawyer peered at Buff over his reddening handkerchief. How much did the infernal fellow know? The deputy's eyes told him nothing of value. Yandle turned and resumed his seat. Caltrop wiped a clammy brow.

"I was going on to say," continued Buff, "that while Tex was firing the shed, some friend of his out on the flat began shooting the Fair cattle."

He paused. The sheriff fidgeted. Buff began to roll a cigarette.

The sheriff coughed. He could endure the suspense no longer.

"Well, did you get the other fellow?" he inquired.

"Not that I know of," said Buff. "Bill, he shot at him and drove him off mighty prompt. It was sure Kergow's lucky day!"

"Kergow!" burst from the lawyer.

Buff nodded.

"Mac Kergow. Didn't you know?"

"Now how in hell should I know who the other fellow was?" testily demanded the lawyer.

"No offense! My mistake! We'll let it go—for now. Yeah, well, this Kergow, although it might not have been Kergow—for all I know it might have been you, Mr. Yandle, or Sam, there."

"Are you accusing me of shooting anybody's cattle?" cried Sam Caltrop.

He did not reach for his gun. As if by chance, Bill Holliday's hand had fallen on his shoulder.

"It's a serious thing, Buff, to accuse anybody of such a crime," the sheriff pointed out severely.

"Oh, I ain't accusing Sam of anything," declared Buff. "I said it might have been either him or Pencil, and so it might. I leave it to you, Joe. Man to man, now, mightn't it?"

"I don't know a thing about it," snapped the sheriff.

"Who's accusing you?" inquired Buff.

Joe chose to ignore the question. He turned and fumbled in the drawer of his desk. Buff's right hand closed on the butt of his six-shooter. He was not quite sure what was coming next; but the sheriff merely held out to him an entirely innocuous bunch of keys.

"Here!" said he. "Might as well lock him up. Judge Dolan went off fishing for a week, so the hearing won't be till after he gets back."

Buff took the keys.

"I was just wondering if you and these other two gentlemen wouldn't like to buy a little fresh beef."

The three gentlemen shook heads in unison. They looked puzzled. It was the sheriff who angled for the answer.

"How you mean, fresh beef?"

"I started to tell you a while back that Mac Kergow shot two of Mr. Fair's heifers. We butchered the heifers and loaded a wagon with beef—three fore quarters and four hind. The family took one fore for themselves. Miss Fair, she drove the wagon in town with us, and it's down in front of the hotel now. Of course, I thought of the hotel and the restaurant right off, and then it came to me that maybe my friends might like some. I thought of you, Joe, and Pencil. It's real luck finding Sam here, too. How many quarters will you take, Sam?"

"Me with cows of my own! You're crazy!"

"Maybe so. Lemme see, you have a family, Sam, so I guess you'll want about three quarters. Those heifers were long two-year-olds, and dressed about four hundred pounds apiece. That 'll be three hundred pounds for you, Sam. Joe and Pencil can have the other four between them."

"Thanks," said the sheriff dryly. "I wouldn't care for any."

"Think it over, Joe," advised Buff. "Pencil is going to take his two, ain't you, Pencil? It — will—help—make—things—easier—for—everybody."

The latter sentence was delivered with a significant pause between each word.

"I'll be damned if—" began the lawyer.

"If you would instruct me on a point of law, Pencil," interrupted Buff, "I'd be grateful. What is the usual penalty inflicted on an accessory to the crime of arson in the nighttime?"

"I don't remember," replied Yandle. "I was on the point of saying that I'd be glad to take two quarters of beef. The usual price, I presume?"

"Not quite. It's such good beef, and we had such a savage time butchering by the light of a lantern, that I think twenty cents a pound would be about right."

"What?" screeched Yandle, fairly startled out of his self-control. "What? Twenty cents, when I can buy all I want for six and eight cents?"

"It ain't only the beef, Mr. Yandle. You're paying for our—er—time. I'll trouble you for forty dollars, Mr. Yandle. Cash—no checks!"

Yandle gulped. He loved his forty dollars as he did his right eye.

"All right," he said in choking tones, and began to dig into a trouser pocket. "I'll pay."

"Will a check do for me, Buff?" asked Sam Caltrop, in accents that were meek and mild, for him.

"Joe will lend you the money, if you're short," said Buff. "Won't you, Joe?"

Joe was on the point of refusing indignantly, but Tex Piper's handcuffs tinkled at the moment, and he reconsidered. His skirts were practically clear, but—

"I'll give you a hundred, Buff, for Sam and me. You might tell the young lady to drive around."

"Thanks—I will."

It was at this juncture that Tex Piper began laughing like a hyena.

Buff, jingling with money, had departed to lock up his prisoner. For a space there was silence in the sheriff's office. Yandle made the first move. He arose and started for the door. The sheriff made the next move. Yandle halted. He did not like the looks of the six-shooter that had appeared in the sheriff's hand.

"What's that for?" he demanded.

"That is to extract one hundred dollars from you before you leave, Pencil!"

"Are you threatening me?"

"Why, no—I'm telling you."

"And what, may I ask, is the reason that you have suddenly turned holdup?"

"Your damned foolishness. If it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't have had to pay Buff Warren a hundred dollars. You don't think for a minute I'd have handed it over so quickly if I hadn't known I could get it out of you, do you?"

"You won't get it—that's flat."

"Is that so? In that case, Mr. Yandle, I shall have the unpleasant duty of sending you to Piegan City to make hair bridles for ten years! You see, Nap Tobias and I have been spending a good deal of time in that empty cell between Tresawna's and that of George Bushong and the Mexican. The three men are pretty free talkers when they think nobody's around. They never suspected we were there for a minute, and we took down several pages of what they had to say. It makes mighty interesting reading, Yandle. How about that hundred dollars?"

"You're a damned scoundrel!" snarled Yandle.

"Only in a small way," said the sheriff modestly. "Dig!"

Yandle dug.

"Another thing, Yandle," resumed the sheriff, when he had counted the money and tucked it away. "The arrangement we talked over the other day for the escape of Tresawna, Bushong, and Chavez is off."

Sam Caltrop came alive with a jump.

"Off? What do you mean?"

"You're interested in this thing, too, are you?" said the sheriff, regarding Sam with a quizzical eye. "Of course, I never guessed that. Pencil was *so* careful not to mention your name! Very tender of your reputation, Pencil is—always."

"Cut that out!" rasped Sam. "Oh, shut up, Pencil! Joe knows. He's no fool. Joe, you don't mean—"

"I mean I'm not falling into any more of your little schemes. Too risky! Life's entirely too short for me to spend any of it in jail."

"You're afraid, huh?" sneered Yandle, sticking his arms akimbo.

"Move over a step, Pencil. I want to watch Sam, too. I sure am afraid — of what my deputies know already or may find out in the future. I'll take no more chances on Buff Warren—not a chance!"

"This Piper incident was pure bad luck," declared Yandle. "Nobody could have foreseen—"

"Except Buff. He foresaw, and now look at the damned thing!"

"Look here, Joe!" said Sam Caltrop. "You can't turn me down this way. You've always been a good friend of mine, and I was intending to fix up Piper's escape with the others. Of course, we can't allow any of them to stay in jail. We've got to get them out of the way."

"Say not so, brother. *We* haven't got to do anything. What *you* may have to do is something in which I'm not interested. Don't slam the door on your way out."

"We can't leave the affair in this shape," Yandle declared desperately. "We—"

"This is my business," interrupted Caltrop. "You're out of it, Yandle."

Yandle turned on the cattleman like an angry bobcat.

"No, I'm not out of it! I'm too deeply involved to permit you to handle it in any way. I started it, and I'm going to finish it myself. And don't think you won't pay my bill, either. I'll be wearing my knife after this!"

"You can—" began Sam in a rage.

Yandle cut him short.

"Cool off and think it over. I'll be in my office all afternoon."

When Yandle was gone, Sam Caltrop remained to gnaw his nails and stare gloomily at the floor.

"This is one fine trick to play on me!" he said at last. "Can't we fix it up some way, Joe?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"I can't help you, Sam. I've got myself to look out for."

"You're the doctor," said Sam simply.

"I sure am. Here's Buff and that infernal girl. I wonder what they want!"

Buff entered, leaving the front door open. Through the doorway one could see the Fair wagon, with Gilian on the seat, one booted foot on the brake lever. The girl looked in at the open door. Buff stared at Caltrop.

"What are you scrouging over in the corner for?" he demanded curiously. "You seem to have a nosebleed, too."

"I have," mumbled Caltrop through his handkerchief. "What do you want?"

"You're a mind reader! I want to know where to leave your beef."

"Oh!" murmured Caltrop, with what appeared to be a sigh of relief. "Leave it with Yandle. I'll—er—send for it later."

XXIII

Buff, crossing Main Street on his way to the Blue Pigeon Store, to pay for Rainbow's split-ear bridle, saw that in the dust which caused him to halt in his tracks. "That" was the clear-cut print of the near fore hoof of a barefooted horse—a print that had been made within the last two hours by a hoof with a break in the wall of the outside quarter.

With great presence of mind, Buff thrust a hand into an empty trouser pocket, slapped the outside of the pocket vigorously, and then turned it inside out. This to impress any casual observer with the idea that he had lost something. Next he stooped and began to sweep with his eyes the tracked street surface. He found three other corresponding hoof marks with the peculiar break in the outside quarter wall.

Buff was far from being the best tracker in the Territory, but he was reasonably certain that these four marks were precisely similar to that of the near forefoot of the barefooted horse ridden by the small-footed rider who had met the Twisted Foot on Packsaddle Creek.

At the thought of the potentialities connoted by this new bit of evidence, Buff's heart leaped within him. Since Gilian's bay had been wearing shoes for several days, it followed as logically as the tail does the cow that the horse from Packsaddle had made these hoof marks in Main Street, and therefore his lady was automatically absolved of any affinity with the Twisted Foot.

So, because Buff wished beyond everything to believe these things, he did believe, and was properly ashamed that he should have entertained for even a fleeting instant the thought that Gilian might possibly have met the man. She had not met him. The sun shone brighter. The birds sang cheerily.

Then memory, temporarily dozing, awoke and promptly dimmed the sunshine and hushed the song of the birds. If Gilian had not met the Twisted Foot on Packsaddle Creek, she had met some one else beyond the Fair cornfield on the evening prior to Tresawna's hearing before Judge Dolan. For all Buff knew to the contrary, she had met the unknown on Packsaddle, too. The girl's manner when he accused her of having been there before the Tresawna incident was evidence of this.

Buff swore under his breath. He had cleared up one annoying mystery only to plunge waist deep into the cloudy waters of another.

Indeed, how did he know he had cleared up the first mystery? Might there not be other horses with hoofbreaks similar to the one possessed by the Packsaddle horse? Might not one of these horses—horses owned and ridden by as many innocent men—have made the marks he had just found?

Buff groaned in spirit. Here he was right back at the beginning of things, drifting, drifting the Lord knew where! What he preëminently needed at that particular moment was action—action that would stir him up and give him something else to think about. The fates discerned his extremity, and sent him what he needed.

"Lost something?" inquired the sarcastically solicitous voice of the storekeeper and postmaster, Calloway.

Buff made no reply. Since his defection from the ranks of the cattlemen, the townsfolk had not gone out of their way to hold speech with him; nor had he gone out of his way to force them to do so. Manifestly he could not constantly repeat the example of Stony Flint; so he had come to accept without much rancor the position beyond the pale where he had placed himself.

Concentrating on the matter in hand as he was, he hardly realized that he was being addressed until Calloway spoke again.

"Lost something, Buff?"

"Six bits," was the brief reply.

"Y' ought to wear your pants inside your boots," suggested Calloway.

"I usually do, but I didn't this morning, not having a bright fellow like you around to hand out free advice—which is the only thing I ever heard of you giving away. Is there anything else I can do for you this morning, Cal?"

Calloway would have been pleased to take the matter up, but he had seen what happened to Stony Flint. He did not care to prod that uncertain citizen, Buff Warren, into a quarrel. Still, he could not resist mentioning what had sprung into his mind at the sight of Buff hunting for something in the dust of Main Street.

"Is it true," he said abruptly, "that that nester — Fair, I think his name is — has been a convict?"

Buff stood up and stared.

"Who told you that lie?" he asked sharply.

"It ain't true, huh?"

"I said it was a lie!"

"I suppose you know. A man in my business hears lots of gossip."

"A man in your business wants to be more careful about passing on the gossip he hears! Where did you hear it?"

"They were talking about it in the store this morning, while they were waiting for the mail."

"Who's they?"

"I'd rather not say. I don't want to make trouble."

"You should have thought of that sooner! Who's they?"

"Well—er—if you must know, one was Yandle, and the other was the sheriff."

"Yandle and the sheriff! Come on, Cal! We're going to see Yandle, we are."

"Not me," declared Calloway hastily.

"Oh, yes, you are, Cal! Don't think you ain't for a holy minute! You'll go if I have to drag you. Would you like a session with me right here and now? Folks are already beginning to stop, look, and listen."

"I'll go with you," said Calloway, whose standing in the community was a tender plant, to be cherished exceedingly.

Accordingly, to Yandle's they went.

They found the yellow-haired attorney alone, immersed in the perusal of documents of legal appearance. At their entrance he greeted them with the top of the morning and his best smile. Buff was not in the least deceived. He knew what Yandle thought of him. He returned the greeting coldly, and sprang his attack at once.

"Calloway tells me you were saying in the post office this morning that Fair, over on the Lazy, is a convict. How about it?"

Yandle regarded Calloway with unconcealed malevolence.

"I heard he was a convict," he said slowly. "What of it?"

"There's this of it," replied Buff. "It's a lie—y' understand?"

"I think you will find that it is the truth," countered the lawyer, tapping on the desk with a pencil.

"It's a lie," repeated Buff; "and anybody who passes it on is a liar, too."

"You can't bluff me," snapped the lawyer, his hand stealing under his vest.

"I'm doing it," observed Buff steadily. "What you waiting for? Why don't you pull that knife?"

The lawyer did not draw. His hand came away empty.

"You've got a gun," he said shortly.

Buff's hand shot out and fastened on the lawyer's wrist. With a jerk, he hoisted Pencil from his chair and slammed him against the wall. Holding him there with one hand, he inserted the other beneath his captive's armpit and extracted the dirk that cuddled there in a leather sheath.

"Now!" began Buff.

A sudden expectant widening of the lawyer's eyes, which were looking over his shoulder, caused him to duck and spring to one side. As he sprang, he swung Pencil away from the wall, and into the place where he himself had been standing.

The lawyer squeaked and tried to writhe to one side. Too late! A heavy stoneware quart bottle of ink, with which Calloway was improving a heaven-sent opportunity to knock senseless the officious Mr. Warren, struck Mr. Yandle on the shoulder, and bottle and attorney went to the floor together. The latter did not break, but the former crashed into a thousand pieces, deluging the latter with Binford's best blue-black writing fluid, warranted to turn the color of jet as it dried.

Buff did not witness the transformation. He was too busily engaged, just then, in administering a thorough thumping to the perfidious postmaster.

Calloway fought back as best he could. He outweighed the deputy by twenty pounds, but handling letters and groceries is not as conducive to muscle building as punching the wily cow. It must be said in his favor that he was a glutton for punishment. Buff was compelled to knock him down four times before he would consent to stay down for more than thirty seconds. Even then he raised himself on an elbow and cursed Buff with freedom.

"I'll get up in a minute!" he snarled through split lips. "You ain't through with me yet!"

"Is that so?" said Buff, who was growing bored with the monotony of pounding a jelly bag. "Is that so?" he repeated, and, kneeling beside the postmaster, he applied the heel of his hand to the latter's nose. "Say 'uncle,'" he directed, and applied the requisite pressure.

"Uncle! Uncle!" cried Calloway.

"Good enough! I haven't time to fool with you any more to-day. Come around when I ain't so busy."

So saying, he seized Calloway by the collar, dragged him to the door, opened it, and incontinently threw him out on the sidewalk.

Buff returned to the lawyer, who, surrounded by stoneware shards, sat in a puddle of ink and tenderly massaged his right shoulder. The sight was not lacking in humor, and Buff laughed.

"You'll have a job getting that ink off your face," was his comment.

The lawyer, still somewhat dazed, put up to his cheek an involuntary hand.

"Is there ink on my face?"

"You just now smeared over the only spot that was white," Buff assured him with relish. "I guess you'll have to retire from our well-known midst till you bleach out. About that gossip concerning Fair, Yandle—where did you get your information?"

Yandle was too wretched to beat about the bush. His shoulder hurt abominably.

"The sheriff told me," he said, between a grunt and a groan.

"The sheriff did, did he? Thanks, Yandle! Try horse liniment on that shoulder. So long!"

The door slammed. Buff was on his way to see the sheriff.

"What's this I hear about you saying Mr. Fair is a convict?" inquired Buff.

"You can't pick any fight with me on that account," promptly replied the sheriff, his hand nevertheless closing on the butt of the gun in the open drawer of his desk. "Somebody told me."

"I don't believe," Buff declared with judicial calm, "that you can get that gun out of the drawer quicker than I can pull. Those long barrels are unhandy in a narrow space. Cramps your style!"

"You may be right," the sheriff told him; "but you needn't think you can lollop in here and bulldoze me like you did Stony Flint."

"All the same," flung back Buff, "I'm going to know where you got your information, or else you can set that gun of yours a going any time you feel like it. I still think I can beat you to it," he added thoughtfully.

The sheriff smiled wryly.

"I'd sure like to take you up, if only to find out how fast you ain't. By the way, you haven't any notion that I'm scared of you, have you?"

"Why, no," replied Buff. "I know you better than that, Joe; but I ain't throwing any bluff about the gun play either. I meant what I said."

"I believe you—you're just that much of a fool. Well, I'll tell you. Simon, the new Starlight bartender, told me this Fair man was a convict."

"I'll see Simon. In the mean time, Joe, anybody who passes on this story, I don't care who it is, is a liar by the clock!"

The sheriff considered.

"If you're going to dry nurse those Fairs forty ways from the jack like this, you'll have a job!"

"Think so? We'll see."

Buff nodded pleasantly to the sheriff and withdrew—backward. His erstwhile trustful nature, since the episode in Yandle's office, had been replaced by one darkly suspicious of the world in general.

"The idjit!" muttered the sheriff when Buff was gone. "He'll do exactly as he says, damn him! I wonder how much he knows?"

But echo answered not, and the sheriff sought solace from the bottle that abode among the handcuffs in the side compartment of his desk.

Buff's method of approach with the Starlight bartender differed slightly from those he had employed with Yandle and the sheriff. He entered the saloon, bought a drink, and nursed it along until the place was empty of other customers. Then, reaching across the bar, he possessed himself of the bartender's wrist, jerked him sprawling halfway across the bar, and laid the cold blade of Yandle's dirk on the back of his neck.

"How come you're spreading around that lie about Mr. Fair?"

The bartender writhed.

"I dunno what you mean!" he protested chokingly.

Buff gently pricked him with the point of the blade.

"Yes, you do too know what I mean," he contradicted. "The sheriff told me you told him Mr. Fair was a convict. How about it?"

"I—I heard he was."

"So you thought you'd pass it on! That was careless of you. Who told you?"

The man made no reply beyond an unintelligible gurgle of woe. As an aid to a more complete understanding between them, Buff again had recourse to the point of the dirk. The bartender suddenly threw his tongue with a vengeance.

"Mis' Fernie told me!" he bellowed.

Mrs. Fernie! Lil Fernie! Buff was so surprised that he let the knife point remain where it was till the bartender's anguished yelping recalled him to the current situation.

Buff removed the knife from the neighborhood of the bartender's neck, but he retained his grasp on the bartender. It had come to him that he need not have been surprised that the trail led to or through Mrs. Fernie. To scratch and spit is the nature of the cat. Lil was merely running true to form. Unable to hurt Buff, she was striking at the girl he loved with this shameful slander against her father.

If the slander had been directed against himself, Buff would have let it pass. Mrs. Fernie was a woman, and there is small gain or honor to be won in a stupid wrangle with a woman; but the Fairs must be protected. Buff decided to see Lil.

"Where's Mrs. Fernie?" he demanded of the bartender.

"She's right here," the lady answered for herself.

Buff turned his head in the direction of the voice, and saw Mrs. Fernie standing at the end of the bar. Steadying her arm by resting an elbow on the edge of the bar, she was aiming at his head a Colt six-shooter of the largest size.

"Let that man go!" she directed.

"Not yet," denied Buff.

"If you don't let him go," she said quite coolly, "I'll put a hole in your face halfway between your mind and your mouth!"

Buff looked at Lil. Her right eye, staring at him along the sights, was as hard as steel and as cold as a miser's heart.

"You don't dare shoot," he declared, with a calmness that he did not feel.

The reptilian eye battled with his steady gaze. The two wills clashed like the swords of duelists. Buff knew that if his eye wavered for a single instant, she would shoot. He discovered that to outstare a human eye in combination with the muzzle of a forty-five Colt is an arduous enterprise; yet he did not so much as twitch an eyelid.

He saw the murderous purpose strengthen in the woman's eye, saw her white finger crook on the trigger. In another instant there would be a burst of flame and smoke, and it would be all over. He held his breath, but still his eyes did not waver.

Then, with an abruptness that was startling, he saw the resolution pass from the woman's eye. She removed her finger from the trigger, lowered the hammer to the safety notch, and laid the weapon on the counter.

"You win!" she said wearily. "I can't do it. You've got too much nerve!"

Buff drew a slow breath. There was a queasy feeling at the pit of his stomach. It had been touch and go.

Lil leaned against the end of the bar, holding her head in her hands.

"I wish you'd drag it!"

"In a minute," Buff said. "Why are you telling folks Mr. Fair is a convict?"

"Because he is," she replied.

"Can you prove it?"

"I don't need to," she said wearily. "You may prove it yourself. It's all in the criminal records of the State of Minnesota. Write to the warden of the penitentiary at Stillwater. He will tell you that fifteen years ago Abijah Fair was convicted of murdering his own brother at Cherry Grove, in Redstone County, and sentenced to twenty years. He was pardoned out at the end of ten years for good behavior, and because he went blind. Fair's own son, Jack Fair, was indicted on the same charge as an accessory, and got the same sentence. He's still in jail."

"I don't believe it," declared Buff. "Go on back where you belong," he added, to the bartender, as he released his captive and backed out of the saloon.

(*To be continued in the May number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Saul the Fifth

THE STORY OF A GIRL WHO LOVED NEW ENGLAND AND A YOUNG MAN WHO HATED IT

By Mella Russell McCallum

JUDY LANE walked quickly along the left edge of the macadam road—the left edge, because of the traffic. She was a waitress at the Pines Tea Room, and this was her mid-afternoon interval of leisure.

She wore a short gray plaid skirt, and a round-collared blouse, which made her look younger than her nineteen years. Her light brown hair was cut boyishly in half curls close to the head. Her gray eyes held live lights. She was not beautiful, yet there was beauty about her—in the cool, varying color of her cheeks, in the litheness of her body, and in the independent lift of her small head.

As she walked, she breathed consciously of the pine fragrance. Occasionally she looked up at the brilliant, the almost hard blue of the sky.

"I just love Maine!" she said out loud. "It's like coming home!"

Yet only three years ago she had never been out of New York, save for a few short vacations.

The pine wood through which the highway led gave way to an open field, where men were haying. The smell of the new hay thrilled her.

"I just love it!" she repeated. "I wish my grandfather had stayed here in New England!"

She crossed a brook. Her steps lagged. She liked the brown-gray water, going cleanly over stones; but this was not her destination.

Farther up a hill she trudged, until she came to a deserted farmhouse, set on a knoll, in the company of giant elms — a house of mournful dignity and purity of line. Judy didn't know a great deal about architecture, but she knew that she loved this calm, oblong structure with its noble chimneys. She wished that she might go in at the paneled entrance, under the fanlight. She had an instinctive idea that the door would give to a healthy shove. Perhaps, some day—

For the present she contented herself with exploring the family graveyard, which lay in a small valley near the road, some two hundred feet from the house.

"Wouldn't mother think I was crazy, spending my time in a cemetery?" she chuckled.

The plot was fenced with rusted iron. A half grown pine stood guard, and a brave growth of ivy defied weeds. It was a God's acre of neglect; yet the tall grasses were graceful, waving over the crumbling stones in the summer breeze.

Yes, her mother would think she was losing her senses. Her mother hadn't approved of her answering the advertisement, in the first place.

"Why in the world do you want to go up there and be a servant?" Mrs. Lane, yawning in her morning kimono, had wanted to know.

Judy hadn't been able to answer the question satisfactorily. She didn't know why she had wanted to come to Maine. She didn't know why she loved it so well now—unless it was because her grandfather had been a New Hampshire farmer, who had uprooted himself in order to win a red-cheeked Brooklyn lassie.

At any rate, she had postponed the completion of her business course, and — according to her mother—had hired out as a servant. And here she was, seating herself in cross-legged content, beside the grave of one Margaret Burnham, who had departed this life for the pleasures of heaven—so the stone said—about the time that her own mother was born in Manhattan.

Judy had pieced the dates and names into history. The oldest stone was marked 1798, and bore the name of Eliza Burnham. Eliza's husband had been Saul—Saul the First, Judy called him.

Among their children was another Saul—Saul the Second. Then there had seemed to follow a generation without the name of Saul. The next Saul—Saul the Third—and his wife Matilda were the most recent burials.

Their son, Saul the Fourth, had died before his time, at the age of forty-five. The old people, Saul the Third and Matilda, had gone to their last rest in 1916, within a month of each other, both past eighty years of age.

Only seven years ago the last graves had been made; yet the place was as impersonally overgrown as if it had been seventy years.

Judy wasn't a melancholy person. There was nothing gruesome about spending an hour there. In down town New York scores of busy people eat their lunches in St. Paul's graveyard every day, without disrespect or depression. It seemed perfectly natural for Judy to come here after the chatter of tea-room guests, and the interminable orders of cinnamon toast and chicken salad sandwiches.

Sometimes she brought a magazine to read; but to-day she just sat and wondered about the race of Burnhams. Hadn't the old people left any children, or grandchildren? If so, where were they? Who owned the place?

She could have asked Mrs. Welch, the shrewd gentlewoman who conducted the tea room; but it was more fun to imagine things. After all, what did the truth matter to Judy Lane of New York? In September she would go back home and finish her course, and set about finding a position as stenographer, and that would be the end of it.

She imagined the Burnham men as stern and just, as her grandfather had been. The women were probably meek or severe. A pious, God-fearing race; yet there must have been flare-outs in the blood, for Ebenezer Burnham's stone read "lost at sea," and David Burnham had taken to wife one Trinita Juarez.

Judy pictured painful scenes between shocked elders and a romantic girl, or a headstrong boy determined to go to sea. The little wife with the Spanish-sounding name couldn't have had a merry time here! Ah, well, they all slept peacefully now, poor dears!

II

As Judy amused herself thinking whimsically about the Burnhams, a Ford drew up beside the road. Two workmen jumped out. They didn't see her. One took a tape line from his pocket and began to measure off some ground energetically. They talked and gestured. Presently they drove away.

Now what had those men been about? Judy felt a sense of disaster. Had the property, through abandonment and unpaid taxes, reverted to the State? Had it been sold? The men hadn't glanced at the house or grounds. They just measured several yards near the road.

The next day Judy had no leisure. She and the other waitress, Harriet Wilkie, alternated in serving the afternoon tea guests. Harriet was a law student, in Maine for her health, and working because she must.

Two days later, when Judy went back to the Burnham place, she found a pile of lumber dumped beside the road. There was no one about, but some one had been digging in the clay.

"I don't know what they're up to, but they're going to spoil the peace and quiet. I feel it in my bones, and it's a wicked shame!"

She took her favorite seat beside Margaret Burnham, and addressed the buried clan collectively.

"Why don't you rise up and stop them, digging up your land?"

The grasses swayed calmly. Judy sighed.

"You're helpless, aren't you, old dears? Well, whatever it is, it's a shame! Here I'd counted on having this adorable place to myself all summer!"

She looked toward the house. Some one was coming out through the door—a man. That was natural, she thought swiftly. If there were changes in connection with the property, of course there would have to be people about. It was probably only a question of time before her occupancy would be questioned.

The man was dark and lean. Evidently he had seen her, for he was coming that way—coming with a step that was curiously graceful for this part of the world. His clothes had a foreign look. He lifted his hat. Judy saw that he was young.

"I suppose I ought to go," she thought; "yet how do I know but he is the one who ought to go?"

He was quite close now, outside the fence. His features were regular, and of dark olive color, and a pair of bright blue eyes looked out of them incongruously.

"How do you do?" he said. "Please don't let me disturb you."

He spoke with complete politeness, yet there was a note of sarcasm.

"How do you do?" replied Judy.

"Do you find them"—he waved to indicate the graves—"good company?"

"Very!"

"I wish I might say as much!"

He laughed a short, unyouthful laugh. Judy leaned forward suddenly.

"You must be Saul the Fifth," she said.

He stared.

"I am Saul Burnham," he admitted; "and — yes, I am the fifth to bear the name. May I come in?"

"It is your graveyard," Judy started to say, but she changed it to, "It is I who am intruding."

He laughed again, not so bitterly, and took off his hat. Judy saw his crisp black hair, and the proud line of his head.

"With your permission—" He sat down under the small pine, his back to the fence, and drew his knees up to his chin. "I am happy to have a visitor. May I ask to whom I owe the honor?"

Judy told him briefly who she was, and why she was here.

"I am a servant at the Pines," she concluded, with downcast, dancing eyes.

"In America servants do not admit the calling. If this were England or France—but I'll make a guess. You are a college girl, working for fun?"

"Yes and no. My college is only a business college, and I'm working to pay for my vacation; but it is fun."

He looked at her curiously.

"Fun—here?"

"Fun of a sort. I've been very happy here."

"You must be a strange girl!"

"It's not strange to be attracted by your beautiful place."

"Attracted by it!" He laughed. "I hate it!"

Judy had invited the remark, yet it shocked her. She rose.

"I must be getting back," she said coldly.

"You didn't go so soon last time. You didn't go until half past four."

"Were you here then?" Judy gasped.

"Oh, yes! I live here now."

There was something more than finality in the young man's tone—there was tragedy.

"Oh, how terrible of me! I never dreamed there was any one about."

"Not terrible in the least. I am flattered. I sincerely hope that the sight of me will not curtail the—ah—pleasure you take in the society of my ancestors. Please sit down again, Miss Lane!"

Judy didn't like the sarcasm. It wasn't healthy. It would have been cheap, but for the accompanying wistfulness and the hint of tragedy that lay behind it. She sat down.

"I hope you'll pardon me, but I've watched you." He could smile charmingly when he wished. "I wish you'd tell me why you are so happy."

Judy laughed nervously. He was so young, yet so unboylike! In the first place, he didn't seem American; and that almost comical intensity!

"I've never had anything to make me unhappy, that I know of." Judy shrugged, to dispose of the question, after the manner of a normal girl. "Just gone to school and business college. There's a lot going on all the time at home; and now, up here—I love it!"

"You are originally from New England—Maine, perhaps?"

"I've lived in New York all my life; but it's in my blood, I think. My grandfather came from New Hampshire. It must be in your blood, too, if you're a Burnham."

He shook his head.

"My father—is here." He pointed to the grave of Saul the Fourth. "My mother—" He paused, then continued in a firmer tone: "My mother was Brazilian. No doubt you have heard the story—the choice morsel of the countryside."

"I haven't heard a thing, and I haven't asked."

Judy spoke tartly. She was sorry for his evident unhappiness, but he exasperated her.

"Then I will not burden you with my history."

"I'd rather hear it from your own lips—if you want to tell me."

He bowed almost formally.

"My father ran away to sea, on a fruit steamer. Once in about every fifty years a Burnham has done that. After several years he established a small exporting business in La Guayra. I was born there; but when my mother died, we gave everything to my maternal grandparents, and went to Havana. I was seven. My father tutored me all the time. He wanted me to go to Harvard—where he had expected to go. Our business prospered, and we traveled in Europe."

Judy was staring stonily at nothing, to conceal a lively interest.

"As my father grew older, he began to think more and more about his youth, and this place. When he finally fell ill, we came here—and he died. He was only forty-five. We had used up all our money by that time, so I stayed on with my grandparents. I was thirteen. I liked my grandmother; but grandfather! I tried to like him, but every instinct, every shred of training and memory, fought against him. He and I quarreled continuously. It is not a pleasant memory, a little boy quarreling with an old man. Then, after four years, Europe went to war, and I ran away to France. I was accepted for the Foreign Legion."

Judy forgot to hide her fascination.

"How absolutely thrilling!"

"Thrilling—yes, while it lasted; but my grandfather never forgave me. He had other property, in Boston—excellent, renting property. He left that to my distant cousin, and I have this wretched farm, which, by the terms of the will, I cannot sell. It was his revenge."

"You don't like farming?"

"I know very little about it. Of course I do not like it!"

Judy twisted away a smile.

"Two years after I left here my grandparents died, as you see. I have postponed the evil day as long as I dared. I had a position with the French government for a time—a small post, but enough to enable me to have the companionship of my friends over there. That came to an end, and there was no alternative—to this. If I had not come before the end of the year, this also would have gone to my distant cousin."

Judy was trying to reserve judgment. His story was romantic, to her, but she was sure she had never seen worse sportsmanship. She rose determinedly.

"Thank you for telling me," she said. "You've certainly had an interesting life. Now I must really go."

Saul the Fifth was on his feet with sudden grace.

"I beg that you will not discontinue the visits—to my family," he said, with a grave bow that seemed to Judy of New York to savor of old Spain itself.

"I couldn't think of intruding any more."

He barred the gateway.

"Please, as a favor—to a not too happy person?"

There was something small-boyish in the incongruous blue eyes.

"Well, perhaps, some time," Judy agreed.

When she was well down the road, it occurred to her that still she didn't know what the pile of lumber was for.

"Well!" she exploded to herself. "I never saw such a disgruntled baby in all—my—life!"

III

Several days passed, during which the neighborhood gossip percolated to her. She overheard Mrs. Whittle, the cook, talking to Mrs. Welch.

"He broke his grandpa's heart, they say," asserted Mrs. Whittle. "It serves him right to have to stay here!"

"Poor boy!" Mrs. Welch replied, in her thoughtful, modulated voice. "Old Mrs. Burnham never understood the mixed blood in little Saul's veins."

"Mixed blood, huh! His mother was a flighty dancin' woman, they say. Well, his grandpa fixed him, all right! He's done with traipsin' around the world, unless he wants to lose a valuable piece of property. The old gentleman was mighty comfortable, Mis' Welch. That Boston property would 'a' let young Saul keep on a traipsin' and skylarkin'. His grandpa fixed him!"

"It's a fine farm, if he only knew it. There isn't a house standing that's more sturdy, either. Poor boy, he doesn't appreciate what he has!"

"You can't expect no dancin' blood to appreciate the Burnham place, Mis' Welch."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Welch.

Judy debated with herself about the partial promise she had made about going back to the graveyard.

She was honest enough to admit that she would like to go. Saul Burnham was different from any one she had ever known. What color, what romance, his life had held! She knew the countryside would disapprove of her going there.

It was something removed from girlish interest, or disregard of convention, that finally led her, a week later, to keep her half given word. It was the open misery of the young man himself.

The pile of lumber was still there by the road. She made her way to the plot, and sat down to read. It was fifteen minutes before the owner appeared. He swept off his hat rather grandly, but his smile was boyish.

“ And how is the embryo private secretary?” he inquired.

“ Quite well, thank you. And the discontented landowner?”

She could have bitten her tongue for that. He smiled wryly.

“ I dare say I do make a rather bad impression.”

“ That was rude of me. I beg your pardon.”

“ You needn’t. I see that I must improve my manners, if I am to be a permanent resident.”

He seated himself opposite her.

“ Then you are really going to stay? I’m glad. I was afraid you wouldn’t.”

“ One doesn’t throw away one’s patrimony. I have no choice but to stay; but ” —a gleam sprang into his eyes—“ I shall not operate the farm.”

“ How can you stay, then? You say you are poor.”

“ Do you see that lumber? That is the beginning of my means of livelihood. I am about to erect a temple, Miss Lane.”

“ A temple?”

“ Yes—a temple to the great god gasoline. Inquiry has proved that this territory is not overrun with such temples, and the highway passes my door. What more logical than that I should cater to the needs of tourists?”

“ Good grief, a gas station!” Judy gasped. “ Right in front of your house! Oh, you wouldn’t do that?”

“ Ah, but I would! I have already hired the proper person to run it, and we shall be purveyors of food, as well.”

“ Oh, oh! Not hot dogs! Don’t tell me you’re going to have a hot dog stand here!”

“ I am sorry my plan does not meet with your approval. There is, I have discovered, profit in it. I hope to make enough to gain a little respite over the winter.”

“ But your grandfather—and your lovely view—”

Judy choked over the prospect. The gracious slope of lawn, the elms around the house—the whole effect would be lost. A gas station and food stand! Lithographs of high-complexioned girls eating ice cream and drinking doubtful-looking red fluids! The pine fragrance overcome by acrid fumes of gasoline!

“ I think you’re wicked! ” she wound up sharply.

His eyes glinted again; and then she knew that curious gleam for malice. He was repaying his grandfather! Like most old residents, old Mr. Burnham must have been proud of his place and of his view. Saul the Fifth couldn’t have found a better revenge.

“ Your expression is not too subtle, Miss Lane. I am sorry I offend.”

“ You ought to be sorry! You’re ungrateful! You don’t appreciate what you have. I live in a five-room flat with four other people, and I never get a breath of country air, or a beautiful vista, without traveling miles and miles for it. You have this—*this*—and you put up a gas station on it! ”

He flung out his hands.

“ But I am not a farmer. I must live! ”

“ Nonsense! ”

Judy hadn’t intended to say so much. She knew it was hard to stop, once she got started. She silenced herself now by shutting her mouth hard.

“ Our viewpoints seem to differ,” he went on. “ Have you ever been up here in the winter, when the pumps are frozen, and the snow is three, four, five feet deep? If you had, I think you would be glad of your five-room flat.”

“ But there must be a way, without *desecrating!*”

“ That is a strong word in the mouth of a babe.”

He smiled sadly. Judy let go the reins then.

“ I’m not the babe you are! Just let me tell you something — you’re just peeved, because you didn’t get that Boston property, which would have let you live abroad. You’re positively the worst sport I ever saw! ”

Whereupon she rose in the dignity of five feet three, and walked away.

He sat perfectly still for a long moment. Then he was on his feet, calling:

" Wait! You don't understand—"

Judy kept on her way down the hill.

IV

SHE was sorry she had said so much. After all, it had been nothing more than plain meddling. It wasn't her concern if an heir wished to execute petty revenge. Saul Burnham was a baby, a poor sport—but he was also a most wretched boy. She hadn't given him a particle of sympathy and understanding. She had gone back because she had felt sorry for him; yet she had done nothing but scold.

Well, the mischief was done. She had discharged all her ammunition and never hit the mark at all; for Harriet Wilkie informed her, the next day, that the gas station was being built. She had told Harriet —with reservations — about her encounter with Saul the Fifth.

For herself, she missed the peace of the hours she had spent in the old graveyard. Well, it was done, that was all!

The neighborhood was divided on the subject of the gas station. Many farmers had erected tourists' supply stands on their property. Many others deplored the custom—deplored the tourists generally. Mrs. Whittle veered, and told Mrs. Welch that, in her opinion, it wasn't a bad idea.

" It shows he's got a little gumption, anyway," Mrs. Whittle said.

" It's a sin, to my mind," Mrs. Welch replied. " His beautiful view will be spoiled. I would rent the place from him for a tea room—it's a better location than this—but I suppose that wouldn't be enough of a revenge to suit him."

" Well, a gas station 'll be revenge, all right! His grandpa won't rest easy in his grave!"

Mrs. Welch sighed thoughtfully.

" A food stand so near will hurt my business, too," she added.

The road to Yarmouth, the nearest town, led past the Burnham place. One day during the next week Judy had occasion to go to Yarmouth. She walked by the half completed gas station without turning her head. The tail of her eye told her that a tall figure was standing halfway up the path that led to the house, and that the figure was lifting its hat with a foreign formality. Judy never looked.

Another week passed. The incident was done, Judy kept repeating. She had met an unusual boy, with an unusual and suffering soul—and she had bungled the contact to suffocation. There was nothing she could do now. She had too much pride, she told herself.

She was humbled when his letter came:

> Yarmouth, Maine, July 17, 1923.
>
> DEAR MISS LANE:
>
> The exacting hours of your employment prevent me from calling on you personally. I wish to make a request—will you not continue to avail yourself of the hospitality of my ancestors? I assure you I shall not annoy you with my presence.
>
> Respectfully,
>
> SAUL BURNHAM.

Judy's conscience hurt her. He must have swallowed a good deal of his pride to write that!

She considered. She would answer by mail. No — she would just appear some day, as though nothing had happened. She hoped he wouldn't keep his word about being absent.

She went the next day.

The carpenters were at work on the gas station. Their hammers were noisy. She sat down beside Margaret Burnham, and opened her book.

Those hammers! The old peace was gone. Tap, tap—tap, tap—like a series of snappy dots with a sharp pencil on a clean sheet of paper.

It was no use. She would stay a few minutes, as a gesture of politeness, and then she would go away. She and the heir of the Burnham place disagreed on fundamentals. They had rasped each other's nerves from the very start. Foolish to glaze over the top of such a disorderly mess as their whole acquaintance had been!

She wondered if the young man was in his house, looking at her. Not likely! He was probably in Portland, buying supplies for his new business—strings of sausages, and the like.

She couldn't sit still. She rose; but, instead of walking away, she found herself going up toward the house. Her heart was pounding hard. She was doing a silly, useless thing.

The sound of the knocker echoed loudly.

Saul Burnham opened the door, bowing gravely.

" I am honored! Will you come in?"

"Oh, no, thanks! I—I just wanted to tell you—why don't you come out and talk to me? I won't scold any more."

The words must have been formed in Judy's subconsciousness, for they startled her. He smiled.

"I thank you. Have you seen the interior of my house?"

Judy found herself inside a hall that was somber and long, with discolored walls. A slender-legged table stood at her left, and beyond, in the gloom, she caught the pure sweep of the stair rail.

"Oh!" she breathed, and was herself again. "Oh, it's adorable! I've always wanted to come in."

They entered the parlor. Here was the old New England, save for dust and dilapidation. There was no touch of the younger generation.

"Even wax flowers," Judy gasped. "But will you tell me why these things haven't been stolen long ago?"

He shrugged.

"My guardian angel has preserved them for my pleasure, no doubt."

Judy bit her lip. She would not scold!

Haircloth and mahogany—samplers and wax flowers—brass candlesticks — braided rugs—a cabinet of curios from the Orient—a Swiss music box, which played six tunes; but Judy saw more. She saw the room cleaned, the fresh, putty-colored walls, the gay chintzes, the wide floor boards painted dark, the braided rugs washed and repaired.

When they went out into the great kitchen, she saw not the dust and the grime, but a yellow floor, and checked curtains, and geraniums. Upstairs were plain, capacious dressers and Revolutionary mirrors and four-posters.

"Oh, you lucky, lucky thing!" Judy almost cried out; but she did not. She only uttered little crows and gasps of joy.

Downstairs again, he showed her the one corner he had touched. Next the fireplace stood a table with books and a pipe and a lamp. A frayed easy-chair was drawn close, and behind were some books on a shelf—not old books, but Stevenson and Conrad and Kipling. For some reason Judy wanted to cry.

They went out into the sunshine.

"What a lawn, if it were mowed!" Judy thought. "What a place for a hammock and wicker chairs!"

They sat down under one of the elms. Judy turned her back to the road. The hammers were still making their staccato dots.

"I suppose you will be glad to get back to your business college, will you not?"

Saul Burnham was trying to be as nice as possible, too.

"I suppose so," Judy replied.

"You'll make an excellent business woman, I think. You have—shall I say a certain necessary plunging quality?"

Judy laughed.

"And what will you do this winter?"

"I don't know." He frowned. He looked at her suddenly. "What would you suggest my doing?"

She jumped.

"How can I tell? I don't know what you're adapted for."

"I was to have studied law, but I have no taste for it. I have very little money with which to study anything, now. My position after the war was routine clerical work, which I hate. I am not artistic or scientific, and I cannot sell gasoline all winter."

"But there must be something you like to do. What is the nicest memory you have—not a sentimental memory, but a memory of doing something?"

"When I was nine, my father and I boarded at a truck farm outside Paris. They wouldn't call it a farm here, it was so small; but the vegetables that Anatole Leblanc used to raise! Every inch of soil was used. Tall plants shaded short plants that needed shade. While my father lay in his hammock, almost too ill to give me lessons, I helped Anatole. I worked for hours at a time, sweating and happy. I loved it; and yet now, when I am undisputed owner of many acres—I hate it!"

Judy selected a long blade of grass, and plucked it carefully, close to the roots. She held it up and examined it, as if she were really seeing it.

"Perhaps—perhaps it isn't the farming itself that you hate. Perhaps it's the disappointment—the having to come to Maine—that makes you hate everything in connection with it."

A groping light came into his eyes.

"Could that be so? I wonder!"

Judy looked at her wrist watch. It was time for her to go.

"I will go with you, if I may," he said.

They walked on the left side of the macadam, because of the traffic—traffic that would soon be patronizing his gas station.

He was seven inches taller than she. They went past the hay field, over the brook, between the pine woods. When they reached the gate of the Pines, he said:

"Good-by, Miss Lane. We didn't quarrel this time."

Judy felt the blood riot into her face.

V

THERE were other afternoons when they didn't quarrel—when they walked to Yarmouth for Mrs. Welch, or in the other direction, which led to nowhere at all, unless one kept on going. Judy didn't go often to the Burnham place. There was no point in getting herself talked about.

They talked of everything except the gas station. He told her of his colorful, irregular life. His South American memories were blurred with happiness. He said his mother had been always young and laughing. He talked of the strong attachment between his father and himself, and of the gray years after his father died, before he went away. He spoke of the war, a little—not much. He wanted to forget the war.

Judy, in turn, told him about her family and her friends in the city—of her brother Jim, who sold stationery, and her sister Helen, who taught in a kindergarten—of her easy-going little bookkeeper father, and her mother, always fretting about small things. He listened eagerly to the humdrum details.

She wouldn't have been a normal girl if the superficial aspects of Saul Burnham's friendship hadn't thrilled her. His Latin blood, his years of travel, his Croix de Guerre—yes, and his good looks! Judy had had many boy friends. She had even drifted in and out of two engagements; but she had never before had a boy friend who needed only a cloak and a plume to be a nobleman.

But the gas station! There it stood, half finished, menacing. Judy almost wished it were completed, and supplying patrons. If he was determined to ruin his ancestral home, why, let it be accomplished quickly!

Harriet Wilkie spoke of the delay.

"I'm afraid your friend is dilatory, Judy."

"I know he is."

"And, Judy, I don't want to interfere, but—you aren't in danger of falling in love with him, are you?"

Harriet's eyes were wide behind her glasses.

"Oh, no!" declared Judy airily. "He's not sufficiently grown up to fall in love with. He wasn't spanked enough when he was young."

Harriet looked relieved.

A few minutes later the unspanked young man was waiting for Judy at the gate. There had been an understanding about a hike to Wall Creek.

"Well, where do we go from here?" Judy inquired flippantly.

"Not to Wall Creek, please! To my place."

Her heart sank. She had caught the excitement under his words. It could mean but one thing—the gas station was done, at last, and he wanted her to come and see it in operation.

They walked silently between the pine woods, over the talking creek, by the hay field, and up the hill. Why—where *was* the gas station?

Judy stared. Only a slight roughness, and a difference in the color of the soil, showed where it had stood.

If he expected her to exclaim, he would have to be disappointed, she decided quickly. He would have to offer his own explanations.

Saul the Fifth was apparently undisturbed by such girlish tactics. He looked neither chagrined nor disappointed at her failure to exclaim.

"I have razed my temple," he said. "I wanted you to see."

Judy nodded, waiting. She felt a miserable sense of responsibility.

"There are many things I want to say to you. I wonder, would you be willing to sit again where I first saw you, beside my great-aunt Margaret? I have pictured you sitting there."

Judy's feet were lead. Those grave, contained tones! Saul the Fifth had given up his revenge, and now he was going to tell her that he had decided to give up his patrimony, too, and to go away again, across the ocean.

When they were seated, he began to speak deliberately.

"It was quite true, that which you said. I was not at all a good sport. Peeved, you said I was."

Judy could have screamed. He was overdoing the business of humble pie.

"It wasn't my affair," she choked. "You had a right to do it."

His eyes were fixed on the valley beyond.

"You have told me that coming up here was like coming home. You had never been in New England before, yet you recognized the spell it holds over its children. I—I recognized it, too; but I fought it. It seemed so drab and dour. My friends in France are gay and charming. I couldn't bear to give them up; but now I know—I know they never were as real as you are, little Judy!"

He went on presently.

"In my mother's country the flowers are large and bright, and there are birds with gay feathers. In Italy I have seen beauty that has made me ache with sadness; but in the blood of the north there is a longing for a loveliness more subtle — for beauty more rare — for the delicate flowers that grow up here—for the pale, cold sunsets—for the life in the air. I've fought against it. I've said I hated it, but—I love it, too! That old man over there—who never understood—"

He stopped abruptly. Judy knew he was weeping.

"Don't!" she whispered. "Oh, I can't bear it!"

He lifted his head.

"*You* can't bear it? But you are strong. You can bear anything. You are going back to New York soon, and you will become a successful business woman, I am sure. Some day, if I prove a successful farmer—but I cannot speak of that now. It wouldn't be fair."

Judy's mind was swaying with the grasses.

"You—a farmer?"

"Yes. It will be different from helping Anatole in his truck gardens, and more difficult. My land is dead, the soil will have to be waked up. I am going to take a course in agriculture this winter, to learn how to do it. I have enough money for that; and next spring"—his eyes came back, narrowed—"next spring I farm in earnest!"

Silence.

"Mrs. Welch says your house would be an ideal location for her tea room. It is a business that wouldn't spoil it—you know her class of customers—and you could go ahead with your farming." Judy spoke slowly. The Yankee blue of his eyes was burning her. She selected a blade of grass with care, and plucked it. "And about that *some day,* when you are a successful farmer—if you don't mind, I'd—I'd rather be a charter member!"

He was on his feet, with his quick grace. Like a courtier, he was assisting her to rise. *A cloak and a plume, and a sword that clanked, and an arrogant lift of head!*

"Judy! Look at me, Judy! I want to see your eyes!"

The grasses swayed calmly among the crumbling stones.

THE WAYSIDE GARDEN

There is a wayside garden
In a mountain vale afar,
And the thought of that wayside garden
Beguiles me like a star.

Would that I might go thither
About the droop of day,
With a rising, falling thrush note
To guide me on my way!

I know that I should find you
With the twilight in your hair,
Among the lovely blossoms
The sweetest blossom there!

You, love, amid your roses
That would fade into eclipse,
For there would be no fragrance
Like the attar of your lips!

Clinton Scollard

The Look

AS AN ANCIENT POET SAID, IT IS PLEASANT TO BE FOOLISH—SOMETIMES

By Rosa Aubrey Wood

IT was all she could do to get to the Garden Club meeting, and she arrived there late. The washing machine had got out of order, and the laundress's temper had followed suit. This had put luncheon back and upset her afternoon with the children—the nurse, of course, was out—so that she had barely time to dump them on an unwilling cook and depart. As she slammed the gate, she glanced back, to see Jacky standing forlornly on the porch, displaying a dirty face and a large, disgraceful hole in his stocking.

Just three suburban blocks away reigned order, leisure, and "culture." Inside the large, cool, slightly darkened reception room, Mrs. Alsop clasped Nan's hot and hastily gloved hand with a serene, bejeweled gesture of welcome, and drew the guest to a chair next her own. With a great sigh of relief, Jacky's mother sank down beside her hostess.

"Made it!" she beamed. "I never thought I would; but really, you know, I'm so tired of fighting the battle of Appomattox with myself cast for the part of General Lee that I thought this time I would be Grant, and let the cook be Lee, just for a change."

Mrs. Alsop eyed her visitor with vague amusement.

"Yes, it's hard on young married people—all these domestic complications. I simply dread seeing Sally marry. Still, so many girls would be so thankful for just *one* of the offers the child has had! I said to her this morning that it's perfectly *awful*, the way she treats the men!"

Nan recalled that Mrs. Alsop, up to a year ago a very sane, intelligent woman, had become the mother of a débutante, in which capacity she had shed nearly all her consideration for others, all her interest in any other subject, and her entire stock of humor.

"Don't let her marry, Mrs. Alsop," insisted Nan solemnly. "I am going to get up a club for the prevention of marriage. If you'll think for just one moment, you'll see it really does an awful lot of harm!"

In the midst of her nonsense, she suddenly knew that some one was listening and smiling. She realized that there was actually a man at the Garden Club, seated not far from Mrs. Alsop. Still feeling his gaze upon her, Nan raised her eyes and saw the look—that God-given expression which some men possess for the joy and despair of womankind. It was an amused and tender glance, saying:

"How beautiful and unspoiled you are! Of course, you are accustomed to admiration, but I alone really appreciate the finest points of your charm, and you permit me to enjoy it. Thank you!"

That look is a pleading and a benediction; and always the looked-upon receives a cocktail, an electric shock, champagne bubbles, and a deep content in one delicious gulp, be she maid, wife, or widow, seventeen or forty-seven.

For Nan the washing machine, her home, children, and poor tired Jack Caperton, her husband, slaving in his office, all mounted upon a magic carpet, and were wafted to that never-never-was land to which a sprightly wife and mother consigns them oftener than they know.

His eyes asked questions.

"Are you really unhappy, or are you merely playing, you delightful creature?"

And Nan, turning her eyes to the speaker for the afternoon, who was just rising, answered with her profile:

"I am dreadfully bored! Come and find out about me when tea is served."

Thus it came about that Mrs. Jack Caperton walked in the garden, after tea, with the stranger. He had managed the introduction so well that Mrs. Alsop was left with the impression that his only thought was of Sally.

They strolled about the beautiful garden belonging to their hostess, pausing occasionally to gaze blankly at a plant. Nan's purpose was to make the acquaintance of a new man for the first time in years.

" Lovely gardens!" he sighed.

" Beautiful gardens and hissing serpents —they always go together in my mind," she laughed. " In fact, I've been looking for a serpent for years, but I've never heard the faintest hiss."

He gazed at her with appreciation.

" When you came into the room this afternoon, I didn't think you really beautiful." His tone was puzzled. " But there's your way of talking—and you are so wasteful with your sense of humor! You threw it away on that mother-of-the-daughter lady, and there was I down on my knees, picking up the very crumbs of everything you said!"

" Really, now, you don't know how grateful a woman of my age, weighing fifteen pounds more than she should, feels toward you—just sheer gratitude! Is it a new charity to provide walking delegates to walk around and make life worth living once more?"

There was a shadow of seriousness behind her smile. In spite of the fifty ladies present, they were alone in the garden. It was sunset, and robins called to one another gayly.

" You are witty, of course," he started, and stopped as Mrs. Alsop came toward them.

The harmony was broken, the duet ended; but the hostess beamed with satisfaction.

" Glad so many members turned up this afternoon! How are the children, Nan? And are all your antique pieces as charming as ever?"

" The children are beautifully well, thanks, but the way I sometimes feel about that houseful of antiques reminds me of a girl who married a Bostonian. She wanted to escape, so he delicately reminded her of all the nice things he had given her, to which his wife replied, ' Oh, yes, I know! It's a good house, good furniture — and *good-by!*' "

There was laughter as all turned to go. Nan knew that the stranger was calculating every step, so that they should gain the gate together.

" Are you going to let me come along?" he said, in a tone so pitched that the bystanders thought he was saying, " Are not the roses lovely at this season?"

Without replying to his question, she turned once more to Mrs. Alsop, who whispered hurriedly:

" Please keep an eye on Sally to-night at the club! Don't let this Mr. Compton monopolize her. He's been hanging about, and I really think it will drive off the other men!"

They had reached the gate, and casually the man turned with her down the shady street.

Nan's perfectly reliable conscience was shrieking at her, but it had been so long since her consciousness had been completely unhitched from washing machines, romper patterns, and vitamines, that she made no attempt to restrain her impulse to play the game once more.

As they neared her home, he asked if she would be at the club that night.

" No," she replied. " I have a husband who becomes a dangerous maniac at the very sound of dance music."

" Or at the sight of a dancing partner?"

" No—he's just against good times. He doesn't hold with them." She turned and held out her hand. " So glad to have met a serpent at last!"

" When shall I see you again?"

" Where did you come from, and where are you going, anyhow?" demanded the young matron in return.

" I came from Kentucky, and I'm going —to be just here indefinitely."

" Where, here?"

" I'm put up at the club for two weeks."

" Yes, serpents always live in clubs. You are perfect. Good night!"

He detained her.

" Won't you reconsider about the dance to-night?"

" I might," she replied, and disappeared up her twilight walk.

II

Breathless, Nan paused on her own steps. A wail from within reminded her of several facts — that she had not ordered cereal for the baby's supper; that she had not sent her husband's suit to be pressed;

that she had forgotten the laundress's wages, and had neglected to tell the cook to take little Jacky's temperature at six o'clock. The magic carpet was wafted back instantly, and deposited the entire family upon her shoulders.

Jacky rushed up and embraced her knees. His cheeks were flushed, and he was munching bread and molasses.

"The baby fell and bumped her head. I couldn't watch her every minute! Was busy with the dinner," was the pleasant greeting of the old retainer of some five weeks' stay.

"I oughtn't to have gone!" came the familiar refrain of self-reproach, as she ran upstairs to console baby, who wore a green and blue "egg" on one temple with an air of mingled triumph and despair. Such a soft little comforting neck to kiss, and such precious dimpled knees to bathe!

Jacky had followed her up the stairs. As she put on the baby's nighty, she watched his cheeks with an appraising eye.

"Please throw away that horrible bread and sirup, Jacky! You know you mustn't eat it."

"It's good for me," he insisted, though regarding it with a listless eye.

"Now, Jacky, you know I'm not that sort of a mamma." It was an old joke between them about "foolish mammas." She would imitate an adoring parent saying that if her boy wanted candy and ice cream, he just must have it, and Jacky was invariably diverted.

"Show me," he demanded

She went through the impersonation. His little body shook with silent laughter, for her son had a true and piercing humor. The bread went out of the window, and Jacky came to her side.

"I'm glad you ain't a foolish mamma!" he said.

The baby was quiet and happy. Jacky leaned against her shoulder, preparing himself for a discussion. She felt the tension go out of his body as the flush died away. Something told her that the cook had not been kind, and the children had felt unguarded, perhaps a little afraid, while she had been walking in the garden with a serpent.

Yet the man's look came back to her. She knew that there was a magic spell upon them both — that just this once her feet might stray the delightful paths of dalliance, before middle age crept upon her. She knew instinctively and positively that there would be no thought of real harm. The danger lay in the secret heartache that she must face after the episode had passed.

The June day was nearly over. A tender twilight dreamed outside her window. Once again twilight and new moon seemed made for her, and not merely as a background to life's haste and everlasting demands. Because of that look in a stranger's eyes, romance once more walked abroad, evoked by her laughter at his subtle flattery, by his joy in her laughter because he was understood.

As she sat alone, the sharp peal of the telephone brought her back to realities. Jack told her that he would not get home until a late train. The wide and easy paths of dalliance were made easy for her willing feet that evening!

Once more she glided upon the magic floor to the sound of flute and bassoon, her feet shod with the shoes of youth, and little fireworks of vanity exploding before her eyes, making her think that the whole world was ablaze.

Always he was unobtrusively at her side, to foresee every wish, to snatch her from the undesirable partner, to arrange for her leaving the ballroom with old Colonel Forbes, while he himself sauntered out for a smoke with a group of men. Circumstances all bowed to his artistry, and soon afterward Nan found herself on an unobserved corner of the porch, alone with him.

They discussed the dance, enjoying each other's summing up of the flapper and her dancing.

"When I was watching you," he observed, "dancing with one of those boys who dance so well, it made me think of those lines:

"To dance to lutes,
To dance to flutes,
Is delicate and rare."

"Ah!" she broke in, and finished the stanza:

"But 'tis not meet
With trembling feet
To dance upon the air!"

For a moment the situation hung between them, slightly stressed by the apt quotation. Then two men joined them, asking for a light, and Compton went off for matches, insisting upon leaving them for the errand. Nan knew it was her cue to return to the dancing with some one else, instead of Compton; so, assuming a yawn, she begged to be taken back to her group.

She did not see Compton alone again, though he was ready to the moment with her wrap, which he put about her as if he was enveloping her with his adoration.

On the drive home, a friend remarked sleepily:

" Rather a stupid party, didn't you think, Nan?"

" Oh, no, I thought it *very* nice," responded Nan politely.

Safe at home, she looked at her own starry eyes in the glass, and murmured, smiling:

" Oh, yes, a *very* stupid party—for me!"

In the dark, she was happy. To-morrow held cakes and candles—no lessons, no duties. Somehow he would see her.

III

As Nan guided her little car to a convenient corner near the courts, a tennis-clad figure rose from the Alsop group and in a casual, leisurely manner came toward her.

" When I was young, my best young man had to tie my horse for me when I arrived at tennis parties; but now it's easier —for the old gentlemen," remarked Nan, trying not to sound breathless.

" I've been sitting by the Alsop child," replied Compton, " and she certainly made me feel one of the old gentlemen you refer to. I've known her since she came out, and it seems to me she gets younger every minute." Once more he turned upon Nan the look, as he added: " Please don't join all those people! Please come and make me happy for just an hour or so. Let's sit over here, and they will think there wasn't room at the courts."

Nan obeyed him, moving with a casual air away from the crowd that was applauding the players in the tournament; but they were hardly seated when Sally Alsop ran toward them.

" Oh, Mr. Compton!" she cried. " They're ready for you over on the far court. It was the quickest set I ever saw!"

Without the slightest sign of disappointment, he rose, bowed, and left the two women. Nan realized that a gesture of annoyance on his part would have started gossip. Only his fine technique would make it possible to go on seeing him. Even as these thoughts flashed through her mind, Sally burst out:

" Oh, Mrs. Caperton, was he talking about me? Mother said he was discussing me with you at the Garden Club yesterday. What did he say? Do tell me! Oh, Mrs. Caperton, don't you think he's the most fascinating man in the world? When you were young, I suppose girls didn't come right out and say when they were in love with a man, but I don't mind telling you. I've been just a perfect fool over him since my coming out party!"

" But, Sally, I never saw you with him! And how about all your other beaus? Your mother told me—"

The girl turned a flushed, embarrassed face to Nan.

" What other beaus, Mrs. Caperton? There are a lot of boys at the house, of course—mother is always inviting some nice girl to visit me, or giving a party; but oh, Lord, it must be nice to have a man in love with you—real, honest-to-God *in love!* Then mother and I wouldn't have to be propping up these rag doll suitors of mine, and pretending I've got 'em when I really haven't!"

Nan was surprised. She was curious, too, to know what was the matter with pretty little Sally and her career; but, above all, she wanted to hear more of Compton.

" Don't all the girls have good times and flowers and candy and things?" she asked, leaning forward and looking into Sally's eager eyes.

" They have good times, I suppose," answered the girl; " but it is so hard to know what to do! Look at Marion Custis. When she first came out, the boys wouldn't dance with her because she wore too many clothes —sleeves, you know, and old-fashioned stuff like that; so Marion simply took off almost *everything*, and expected to have a gorgeous time. What do you suppose the boys said? Why, that they were ashamed to dance with her, because she didn't have on enough! So you never know!"

There was a silence as Nan dwelt gratefully on her own youth, and thought of her coming out, twelve years before, in a college town. She wondered how to get Sally back to the subject of Compton. Suddenly the girl spoke again:

" It's funny, Mrs. Caperton, Marion and I were talking about you yesterday, and both of us said we'd bet you used to have lots of *real* beaus. You look sort of fed up," she added thoughtfully, and with a trace of awe. "Nobody ever sees you vamping some old fool for the sake of being seen with a man. And that's why I decided to talk to you about Elliot Compton," the girl went on, handspringing back to her usual subject, Sally Alsop. "I don't often do team work with mother, but for him I have. Sometimes he seems to like me a lot. He's lots older, you know, but he says I'm different from most débutantes. He looks at me and makes me feel—he makes me feel—"

The girl's voice died away, and in her softened face Nan read a tender memory of the look. She realized that Sally saw her future self—idealized, mature, complete—reflected in the fascinating eyes of the man she loved.

To the older woman there came the understanding that what his gaze had meant to herself was a revival of the youth she had already spent, of the romance she had already lived, and of a self that she had long since discarded for one to which she was suddenly glad to return.

"Sally," she said earnestly, "are you asking my advice?" At the girl's nod, she went on: "You are very pretty, and I can't understand in the least why you—why those proposals we all had so much faith in never came off; but don't talk like the other débutantes. Say what you think to Mr. Compton. He is the sort of man who—who knows women rather thoroughly. Don't try to be cleverer than he. Just be his honest little friend, and soon he'll be telling you about all the others." Nan rose as she finished, and added: "I see him coming back—to you. Now I'm going to get some tea!"

But Compton had timed his movements with hers so perfectly that she could not avoid being intercepted on her way to the tea table.

"We have been talking about you," she said, glancing back at Sally. "I don't blame you for saying that she gets younger every minute." With an envious sigh, she added: "A face as lovely as Sally's doesn't often go with so much character."

"But, Mrs. Caperton," interrupted the astonished man, for once thrown off his balance by her complete change of personality, "I've been longing to see you ever since—"

"Go along!" she broke in, tapping him vampishly on the arm. "You're a regular flatterer!"

For that moment Nan Caperton bravely appeared to her world as a man hunter. Then she sauntered past Compton, leaving him to join the pretty girl who had indeed discovered her future in his eyes.

IV

How cool and quiet seemed the nursery where Jacky lay waiting faithfully for his mother, his best beloved.

"I'm awful glad you've come!" he cried. "After the baby goes to sleep and Mary goes downstairs, I smell ghosts around this house. Father hasn't come; so it's a long time before you go down to dinner, and we can have a story party right now. Begin and tell about the little boy and the foolish mamma!"

So Nan told, while a whippoorwill called outside in the June dusk. Jacky grew quieter and quieter till she stopped. Then his little voice, steeped in content:

"I'm glad *you* ain't a foolish mamma!"

AT MIDWAY HOUSE

At Midway House—say, thirty-five,
  When back of us lies eager youth,
With all its glories still alive,
  And hope and strength still ours, forsooth—

At Midway House, when stretching on
  The fertile future beckons, "Come
To fuller years than those now gone,
  To richer strains than those now dumb"—

At Midway House love fain would stay
  And let the days be always thus;
But since we must be on the way,
  We bid love take the road with us.

William Wallace Whitelock

The Token

THE STORY OF A STRANGE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The House of Peril," etc.

XIX

ADHERING resolutely to the line of action he had mapped out, Linton did everything in his power to restore self-confidence and will-power to the broken man whom he had known as a brave soldier in the darkest days of the war. To begin with, he interested him in a menu, and persuaded him to begin the sating of a ravenous hunger by taking a plate of soup.

Singularly enough, the next thing Jenks asked for was a supply of cold beef and pickles. It did not occur to Linton until later that the poor fellow sought what was most quickly obtainable. He himself nibbled at a lobster salad, thinking he could thus conceal his own lack of appetite.

Though grudging each second of delay, and literally afire with the knowledge that here, at last, was one who might know something of the murderous schemes in which Lefèvre and his associates were engaged, he exerted himself to the utmost not only to conceal his own anxiety, but to allay his companion's. He succeeded so well that Jenks was soon talking freely of the "old days," and actually expressing the hope that there might be another war.

"A fellow knew where he was, then," he said, "and the government thought something of him."

At last, when the bill was paid, the two went out, and Linton hailed a taxi, saying, with smiling carelessness, that he had not heard yet where his rooms were situated, and would have to find out. It came about that Jenks was inside the quadrangle of New Scotland Yard before he recognized that ominous environment.

By this time, however, the precise mental process which Linton looked for had taken place in the man's mind. He was back again in the friendly relationship of officer and private on active service. He felt, somehow, that the weight of British law and order was supporting instead of oppressing him. With the natural instincts of a sound-hearted outcast, who, after listening perforce to evil counsels, yet could not endure the knowledge that a girl who had befriended his mother should be in danger from schemes in which he was concerned, he rallied to a call which in reality he understood very much better.

"So I'm here, am I?" he said grimly, as he and his companion were halted by the constable on duty. "Well, fall in the escort, with fixed baynits!"

"There is no escort, and no bayonets," Linton assured him. "I want you to meet one or two men higher up—that is all. I undertake that you will be free to go when you please. But, as a reasonable human being, you should ascertain first where certain rascals are leading you, and then decide whether you will throw in your lot with them or with us."

The message he sent to Mr. Winter secured a prompt summons to the chief's office. Furneaux and Sheldon were present also, and they had been busy, apparently, as the big table was littered with memoranda in orderly disorder.

Linton told his story with soldierlike brevity, and saw that the others were greatly impressed by its possibilities. He touched lightly on the absence of alcoholic refreshment during the meal, and the chief took the cue instantly. Rising, he unlocked a cupboard, and produced a bottle, a siphon, and a tumbler.

"I keep a small supply of liquor here for strictly medicinal purposes," he said

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blandly. "You, Mr. Jenks, have been under the weather, so I prescribe a fair-sized dose, well diluted. Are you a smoker? Will you have a cigar, or do you prefer a pipe?"

"I'd like a cig, sir, if you have one," came the quite cheerful answer.

The chief did not indulge in cigarettes, but Sheldon proffered a well-filled case.

"Now, Jenks," went on Winter agreeably, with the air of one who had not a care in the world, "you have probably done yourself, as well as Miss Mainwaring, a good turn by your action this evening. Do you know what has been happening at Dorking? Have you seen the evening newspapers?"

Yes, the ex-soldier had picked one up in Piccadilly Circus, but had only suspected the connection between the Surrey contingent and those with whom he had been brought in contact in certain clubs and popular institutions where one got a bed cheaply.

"Somebody seems to have been firing off gas shells and Black Marias down there," he said, "but that's nothing to what is planned for London to-night. The government is goin' to be terrified, sir — that's what they said. We fellows, the under dogs, are not to make a move till we're taken off the leash—that's the way they put it—but to-night's show is meant to prove that the men behind the social revolution are in earnest."

"I take it you really have no notion what these people have in mind."

"Just a general bust-up — that's all I know. It may be the Houses of Parliament, or Westminster Abbey — these lads have a special down on the church — or some offices in Whitehall, or some big hotels, or all the lot, for what I know, but the idea is to scare the public and puzzle the police. I remember those very words being used."

"By whom?"

"By the chap Captain Linton and me met in the Strand to-night."

"Do you know his name?"

"Names were never used, sir. It was always 'a friend of the downtrodden.'"

"Did they ever give you any money, or food?"

"Precious little of either. We were to help ourselves when the smash came."

"What sort of smash?"

"The upset of the whole caboodle—law courts, City, and West End. They mean it, too, guv'nor. All the houses are marked. I heard about Lord Copmanthorpe's place being on the first list, and, thinking it might be for to-night, I just had to go and tell that nice young lady to look after herself."

"What time to-night?"

"Eleven o'clock, some of our boys said, but I don't know who told them."

The chief glanced at a clock; at that moment the chimes of Big Ben came through an open window.

"If anything happens—" he began, but a telephone jarred at his elbow.

"Harrow Road police station," said a voice. "Sergeant Davies speaking. At ten fifty a taxicab traveling east along Praed Street, near St. Mary's Hospital, was blown to pieces. The explosion was tremendous, and was followed by a fire which resembled the action of an incendiary bomb. Three passers-by were killed, and several people are seriously injured. Fortunately, the driver of another taxi, making for Paddington, had just passed the vehicle which blew up, and he recognized the chauffeur as a man whom he knew. We are making inquiries, and will ring again if we ascertain anything further before midnight. Just now the street is blocked by thousands of people, which makes things difficult."

"Let us hear from you at any hour," said the chief. "Do you want help?"

"I think not, sir. Our special squad is on duty, as per to-day's general order."

"Good! Hold on a second."

Winter passed the phone to Linton.

"Give the best description you can supply of the fellow you saw outside the Strand Restaurant at a quarter past ten," he said, "and ask Sergeant Davies to circulate it at once, with direct and immediate reference to Paddington Station."

Linton complied, and the others did not fail to notice that Jenks was intensely interested. Winter nodded to Furneaux, who tackled the new witness in an undertone.

"I suppose you cannot tell us much more to-night that would be useful?" he inquired.

"I'm afraid not, mister," said Jenks. "The fact is, I'm dead tired. My mind won't work."

"I thought so. Now I will send for one of the men on night duty, who will take you to a room in a quiet street close by. To-morrow morning Inspector Sheldon will arrange for your breakfast to be brought in at half past eight. If you will give him particulars, he will be with you before nine o'clock with a new rig from top to toe. That, plus a shave, will make a new man of you. Then he will accompany you here, and, if you are willing, you can work with another ex-soldier, under Captain Linton's orders. This will give you a fresh start in life, and hardly any one will recognize you when you are properly dressed; but—you must be with us body and soul. Will you do this?"

"Would a duck swim?" agreed Jenks with enthusiasm.

Linton could not help smiling as this latest recruit left the room.

"What are you grinning at?" squeaked the little man, during a pause, while Sergeant Davies was writing industriously at the other end of the wire.

"I hear my bed vanishing, and, of course, I couldn't call at the Rag," was the *sotto voce* answer.

"I don't care tuppence where *you* sleep," snapped Furneaux. "Probably at the Ritz, as you seem to fall on feathers and fine linen all the time. *'Cré nom!* What luck to find Jenks! And all through that girl!"

"What luck to be able to sleep anywhere!" sighed the chief. "I seem to be in for an all-night session. This blow-up in Praed Street is the best thing yet. It promises really well. Who says that a policeman's lot is not a happy one? Doing constabulary duty beats the Grand Guignol melodramas sky high these days. Finished, Mr. Linton? Well, take that other phone, and see if your club can provide, though Heaven only knows what time you will turn in. If Jenks's information is correct, there may be more serious bangs in London tonight than this at Paddington. Didn't I say something about medicine? I imagine we can all do with a small reviver."

He staged four more glasses.

"Did you enjoy your after-dinner stroll with the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring?" inquired Furneaux, when Linton had booked a room at the Army and Navy Club.

The younger man suppressed the obvious question as to why he had been denied any real knowledge of the lady's identity.

"Yes," he said.

"Is that all you have to say? Not a word of thanks, for instance?"

"I nearly succeeded in making a fool of myself, if that is what you are anxious to know."

"Not at all. I took that for granted. Did she put you through the third degree when she discovered who you were?"

"Something of the kind. Certainly, she was not very communicative. I was in absolute ignorance of the fact that she was Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter until poor Jenks blurted it out, under compulsion, so to speak, from a gentleman named Dewar."

"Ha, Dewar! A genuine cop!" said Furneaux. "What a scream, that Detective Dewar should figure as the messenger of the gods!"

Linton actually blushed, whereupon the chief broke in.

"Pay no heed to this shrimp," he said. "He means well, and don't forget that if you had known yesterday, or even to-day, what you know now, it is highly probable that events would have taken an entirely different course. You see that, don't you?"

"I—suppose so, sir," was the hesitating reply.

"Do you doubt it?" cackled Furneaux. "Both you and she would have aired your best drawing-room manners, which are horribly out of place when police work is in full swing. But even if you were worried because you couldn't make love to an upper housemaid, no matter how charming she might be, you did devilish well in holding back so thoroughly at a moment when you must have wanted to leave Jenks and dash after the conspirator in the taxi. By the way, how did you learn to take in so much of his appearance at a glance? That touch about the brown silk tie and pearl pin was ultraprofessional."

Linton laughed.

"I was taught that trick by my father," he explained. "He held that a soldier should begin early to train his eye and his memory. When I was a small boy, he would allow me one glance at a shop window, and give me a penny for every object in it which I could name accurately afterward. I well remember collecting two bob outside an ironmonger's place."

"You'll be a loss to the profession when you collar that chief constableship," said Furneaux. "I am almost sorry Miss Peggy isn't lowly born. We might have kept you in the Yard. The girl herself may be willing, but her pa and ma will probably prove obdurate."

"Any more of this movie stuff will drive me crazy!" growled Winter, reaching for a cigar box.

He was interrupted by the telephone. It was Sergeant Davies again.

"I sent a man on a bicycle to Paddington Station," said the sergeant. "He reports that a gentleman who answers to every detail of the description supplied took a Gladstone bag out of the cloak room there about twenty minutes to eleven. He was in a great hurry, and carried it himself to a waiting taxi. It has also been ascertained that the driver of the cab was the poor chap killed in Praed Street ten minutes later."

"Why the delay?" inquired Winter sharply.

"What delay, sir?"

"Between the departure of the cab and the time of the explosion. There are fully five minutes unaccounted for. A taxi would reach St. Mary's Hospital in less than two minutes at that hour."

"I'll have further inquiries made, sir," said Harrow Road humbly.

It may be stated now that the owner of the bag wasted nearly five minutes while the taxi was still in the station. Some porters who saw him thought he was rearranging the bag's contents.

"I think I see light," cried Furneaux, propping his chin on both clenched fists, and resting his elbows on the table. "For some reason, possibly not unconnected with events at Dorking, to-night's demonstration was called off, literally at the eleventh hour. I shall not be surprised to learn that the cloak rooms of several important London termini were to be blown to smithereens at eleven o'clock. How easy—with clockwork machines! The scheme was postponed by orders from headquarters, the bags were withdrawn, and the mechanism of the bombs stopped. The man whom Linton saw must have fumbled his job, or the time indicator got slightly ahead of his calculations. I'll bet you a new hat, chief, that our men are now picking pieces of his respectably clad body off the shutters and doors of certain shop fronts in Praed Street. I do hope most sincerely that they find that pearl pin. It should be given to Linton as a keepsake."

"That, and a certain half crown," said Linton.

"Miss Mainwaring gets the half crown, if she wants it—which I very much doubt. The Dorking chemist is the rightful recipient. That photograph of his was a masterpiece. But we have a long way to go before we begin distributing souvenirs, and some of us may not be alive to claim them. I despise criminals, as a class, but this bunch of crooks is well organized, and directed by a real brain."

"What proof is there yet of any supernormal intelligence being at work?" put in Winter.

"Jenks! That these scoundrels' propaganda should have got down to Jenks and his like is the most significant fact laid bare thus far. I pay little heed to high explosives. Hundreds of thousands of people in Europe know the chemical formulæ of all sorts of destructive agents, be they variants of T. N. T. or chlorine gases. The really dangerous thing is psychological knowledge, which enables those possessing it to play on the ignorance and prejudices of the multitude. The Jenkses of London and every other city in the world have only to gaze ferociously at the sleek men and expensively gowned women pouring out from the theaters at this hour, and hastening in costly limousines to restaurants and dancing clubs, to make them ready to believe the crazy nostrums offered them by so-called regenerators of the social system. That is the real peril—the world-wide powder magazine waiting to be fired by Lefèvre's squibs. I say most earnestly that unless we crush this fellow soon, the great war will be child's play as compared with the great collapse!"

XX

Nothing could have more weight with a listener like Linton, accustomed as he was becoming to Furneaux's flippancy and sarcastic humor, than the little man's real seriousness at this moment. Those few tumultuous words seemed to open an illimitable vista of ruin and terror and mob rule.

Winter, too, was impressed. He laid down a cigar that he was about to light.

"We are not wasting any time," he said slowly. "Considering that Lefèvre has worked with such secrecy and cunning, we have got on his track fairly well in twenty-four hours."

"We've had a lot of luck, with precious little divination. Oh, yes—that is my special job, and I've fallen down badly. For Heaven's sake, smoke, or I shall believe that the sky is falling."

Winter picked up the cigar again.

"Sorry you're so hipped," he cried, with a cheerfulness which, if assumed, was highly creditable to his powers as an actor. "I'm puzzled, I admit, but not despondent. I have never yet seen a crank win his way by sheer force. He may succeed on the platform or in the press, or startle honest citizens by a book, but when it comes to a real fight between order and disorder, he is no more prepared to encounter the power of the law than a quacking duck can resist having its neck wrung at the appointed time. What do you say, Sheldon? You look at things differently from the rest of us. What is your opinion?"

The junior detective was inured to jokes about the peculiar difference in size between his right eye, which was large, and his left eye, which was small.

"I have at least the benefit of two points of view, sir," he said with a smile; "so, while agreeing with Mr. Furneaux that there has been an almost phenomenal element of luck in our investigations thus far, I cannot help remembering that something of the kind takes place in connection with every big affair we tackle. That is only the beginning, however. Then our resources and experience come into the scale. You ask what I think of this business. I think Mr. Furneaux and you should be in bed as quickly as you can get there. You're worn out. You've had a long day, and there may be a still longer one in front of you tomorrow. I can remain here till two o'clock, and will leave a memorandum of anything that turns up."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" cried the chief, rising. "My own impression is that Lefèvre and his crew are scared, and will lie low for a time, believing we shall be lulled into forgetfulness. Those fellows always hug that silly notion. I'll bet you a new hat, Furneaux, there isn't another explosion for a week."

"Done––although I should be glad to have to pay for a new cover for your massive cranium."

The blinds were not drawn, and the windows were open. Winter, who happened to be facing that way, and Furneaux and Linton, seated with their backs to the door, saw a vivid burst of light leap into the sky over South London. Soon came a sullen boom which rattled the window panes.

"Talking about new hats!" chortled Furneaux.

"Now I'll believe that Nero did really fiddle while Rome burned!" shouted the chief angrily.

"That bang took place about a mile and a half away," announced Linton.

"Bed!" roared Winter derisively, glaring at Sheldon as if he were in some sense responsible for the latest development. "I can see myself in bed about Christmas time if this sort of thing goes on!"

"Shall I call Kennington Park Road, sir?" inquired Sheldon.

"What's the use? Wait till we hear from them. Are you sure about the distance, Linton?"

"Yes, sir. I counted the seconds between the flash and the sound."

"Then it cannot be Waterloo, and London Bridge is a long way to the eastward. There is no important station in that direction. Perhaps these devils have blown themselves up!"

The telephone rang.

"The chief commissioner, of course," said Winter. "By Jove, he's quick on the trigger!"

The instrument in use happened to be near Furneaux, who took off the receiver. He handed it, with a grin, to Linton.

"A lady on the wire," he said.

It was Peggy. She was distressed but apologetic.

"I do hope I am not interfering at an awkward moment," she said; "but a little while ago I was seated at my bedroom window, looking out into the street, and thinking over my day's adventures, when I saw a blaze of light beyond the Marble Arch. I know it was beyond, because the arch itself was silhouetted against it. Then came a bang. Soon afterward two men appeared in our street, but ran away when some one —I think it was the detective who grabbed Jenks — challenged them. They were stopped by some policemen a little farther on, and there was a fight, but I am sure they were captured quickly. I felt I had to ring up and tell some one. While waiting at the phone, I heard another bang. I cannot tell you how relieved I am to hear your voice."

"Please don't be alarmed, Miss Mainwaring," said Linton quietly. "Such skirmishes only reveal the enemy's position. The mere fact that those men were arrested in the street shows that you may sleep in safety."

"As it is you speaking, I want to apologize for my horrid behavior to-day."

"What have *you* done that calls for apology?"

"Misleading you the way I did; but I was terrified of figuring in the newspapers."

"Line wanted!" broke in a voice, and the circuit was broken forthwith.

There were two phones in the room, and both were in demand. Winter took the commissioner's call, and Furneaux that from Kennington Park Road police station. The inspector in charge there announced that a storage warehouse in South London had been wrecked by an explosion, and was completely destroyed by an extraordinarily fierce fire which followed. Two night watchmen were assumed to have been killed, but, so far as was known, there were no other casualties, though many people in the neighborhood complained of shock. The fire brigade was powerless to save any part of the warehouse, but was protecting adjoining property. Deponent thought the affair resembled the operations of the gang concerning which a general order had been issued that day.

Furneaux thanked him, and said that his opinion would be communicated to the commissioner without a moment's delay—which was true enough, if not in the sense understood by the gratified inspector.

The next call came from Vine Street, to inform headquarters that two men, charged with "loitering" in Curzon Street, had resisted arrest. Nothing of a suspicious nature was found on them when searched, but they refused to give names or addresses, and had therefore been locked up.

Furneaux sprang from his chair.

"I'll see those lads to-night," he said. "This is one of the occasions when one longs for the full and free use of the torture chamber in the Tower. *Au revoir sans adieux!* Meet you all at half past nine in the morning—perhaps!"

"You be off, too!" cried Winter to Linton and Sheldon. "I'll sleep here. The newspapers will soon be on the job. Don't forget, Sheldon, that you have to look after Jenks early to-morrow. Be sure to do him well! As usual, Furneaux is right. Jenks has suddenly become the nerve center of our activities."

XXI

SHELDON had rooms in Shaftesbury Avenue, so Linton walked with him up Whitehall, after sending his bag in a taxi to the Army and Navy Club. The after-theater rush of traffic had practically ended, and the spacious street—in many ways the most dignified thoroughfare in London—was empty enough to reveal the placid beauty of its varied architecture.

The government offices on the west side were impressive in the half light of a June evening. They bore the guise of solid purpose, and seemed to represent the power and majesty of Britain. It was almost impossible to believe that the stage thunder of a coterie of crazy theorists could lay in ruins not only these stately buildings, but all that they stood for.

Linton said something of this to his companion, of whom he knew nothing save that he was evidently a trusted associate of both Winter and Furneaux.

"I wouldn't have had the slightest hesitation in agreeing with you before the war," commented Sheldon thoughtfully. "To-day I am not so sure. I think we are passing through a transition period. Unknown forces have been let loose, and, whether we like it or not, they will direct our public life into new channels. If our people retain their traditional common sense, all will be well. If they yield to hysteria—and they are perilously near the border line just now—we may still survive as a nation, but there will be some remarkable changes in the British temperament. I am certain of one thing—we, in our time, will never again see the contented and prosperous England of 1914."

"But change is inevitable. Surely the future of the British Empire is not at the mercy of fanatics like Lefèvre!"

"Not if we can make people understand the real danger of the situation. If Russia, eight years ago, could have visualized her condition to-day, the revolution, even if it broke out, must have followed a very different course. That is the trouble. Political and economic experiments often produce unforeseen and lamentable results, but it's a deuce of a job to get their advocates to admit the fact and mend their ways."

"So you share Mr. Furneaux's rather disconcerting pessimism?"

"One never knows what Furneaux actually has at the back of his head. For one thing, quicksilver, not red blood, runs in his veins. For another, he is a creature of impulse, and just now he is thoroughly annoyed because he has failed so far to arrive at some extraordinarily acute bit of inductive reasoning which would reveal who Lefèvre actually is, and what he is aiming at. Of course, we can all of us fall back on communistic shibboleths; but Furneaux believes, and I agree with him, that this particular gang is working on a definite program. I tell you candidly that in my opinion we are up against something new and startling in the methods of the social revolution."

"But you yourself said that you were satisfied with the progress made by the department in one complete day. Our inquiry literally began with the stabbing of Foster last night."

"I *am* satisfied, yet I hate to see Furneaux unsettled. For instance, any other man, and he himself on any other occasion, would have crowed over the confirmation of his snake theory to-night, but he let it go by as of no importance."

"What's this about the snake? I haven't heard."

"Ah, I forgot! You put us all on a new scent when you produced Jenks, though, oddly enough, it was just the appearance of Jenks which unsettled the little man more than anything else. His disturbance at finding that Lefèvre's teachings had reached Jenks and his class was no make-believe. There are millions of Jenkses, you know. That is why Furneaux hurried off to interview the two fellows who were grabbed in Curzon Street. But—about the snake. Some one unknown—a man not answering in any respect to Lefèvre's description—called at a naturalist's shop in the Old Brompton Road long after closing hours last night. He bought a common green snake—a perfectly harmless creature—and took it away in a black box exactly similar to the one you saw on the table in the Dorking house. By the way, a call came through from Charing Cross about eight o'clock this evening for Ruffini at Mr. Thistleton's place. The policeman on duty there said that Ruffini was not in, but he would deliver any message. The inquirer, a foreigner, who spoke English well, asked if Ruffini had gone to London as arranged, and the policeman answered that he had not, but was probably engaged with the head gardener, the drought having rendered it necessary to water the flower beds thoroughly to-night. The voice requested him to tell Ruffini not to travel to town at all this evening, as the theatrical performance was postponed until this day week, or even later. Of course, the call came from a public telephone office."

"So that is why Mr. Winter was so ready to wager a new hat?"

"Possibly. However, Furneaux knew all about it when he took the bet. The chief almost keeps him in new hats. I believe he does it purposely, just to find out what really is in his mind."

"All the same, I'm convinced that Furneaux won by mere chance."

"Why?"

"An explosion in a storage warehouse! What an absurd setting for a tragic occurrence meant to shock England, to say nothing of worrying the police!"

"But suppose it was intended to destroy evidence? Lefèvre knows we are on his track, and, it may be, not so far off the true line as we ourselves imagine. That is a feature of this affair. Destruction, complete annihilation—these are the things aimed at, and secured, too. There doesn't appear to be a shred of anything left in Avenue House which offers a clew. Well, you cross the road here. Good night! We may be wiser this time to-morrow."

Next morning Linton telephoned Curzon Street, as arranged. Miss Peggy announced that she had slept like a top, once her head reached the pillow.

"But," she went on, "I want to know at once, please, whether you are speaking from Scotland Yard or from some place where no one has authority to cut me off without a word of explanation."

"This time you are secured from interruption," he replied, laughing. "I am talking from my club."

"Well, wouldn't any one be annoyed by such treatment? This is the second time it has happened."

"If you knew the excuse on each occasion you would pardon us, Miss Mainwaring. Last night, especially, we were throbbing with excitement."

"Can you tell me anything?"

"Not publicly."

"Will you lunch here, or come to tea?"

"May I phone you later? Surely Providence will be kind, and permit me to keep one fixture or the other!"

"I'm awfully excited. Is there any real news?"

"Lots, though not what you and I want most to hear."

"I don't quite get that."

"Well, our efforts can have only one successful outcome—the capture of certain persons."

"Oh, that would spoil everything!"

"I fear the telephone is now affecting my intelligence, for I don't understand that remark."

"Isn't it clear that as soon as the chase ends, I revert into a perfectly normal young person?"

"I see now! Unfortunately, the death roll is mounting rapidly."

Peggy was regretful, and said so.

"I know I mustn't ask any questions," she declared. "I'll curb my curiosity till you arrive; but do tell me one thing—will there be any interesting paragraphs in the early editions of the evening newspapers?"

"Undoubtedly. There are two important items in this morning's press—the taxicab incident in Praed Street, which you witnessed, in a sense, and the explosion in South London, which you heard. Read these in the light of your own knowledge, and you will guess a good deal."

"Don't go yet, I implore you! What became of Jenks?"

"He is well, and happy, I hope. I am now about to meet him. Not another word dare I utter, or you will be sure to use other names."

"How delightfully mysterious! I shan't stir out of the house till you phone, so please remember that you are keeping me interned on a lovely day."

"I take it, of course, that you are not going to Scotland?"

"How stupid of me! That is the first thing I meant to tell you. My people are coming to town by the night mail. I shall be in London for weeks."

Quite regretfully, Linton broke off the conversation — not that he lacked words. The trouble was that he might not utter them. He had taken thought during the cold light of early morning, when the events of life, even its waking dreams, lose a good deal of the glamour that they borrow from evening shadows.

It would have been difficult enough to disrupt all his material prospects so that he might not only marry a girl chosen from the wage-earning class, but might live happily with her. The social distinctions set up in Mayfair were just as potent as those that obtain in Bermondsey. The daughter of a wealthy peer, one already marked out for the high places of political preferment, was nearly as far out of reach for a young chief constable of police as the said young chief constable for a housemaid!

"This will never do!" he told himself, lighting the first pipe of the day. "I really ought not to go to either luncheon or tea."

He ended by going to both — an unlooked-for development which came about in the most natural way.

When he reached Scotland Yard, shortly before ten o'clock, he met a rejuvenated Jenks and a spruce Blenkey. Though awed by their surroundings, the two men were conscious of being distinctly removed from the common order of mankind, inasmuch as, each in his own way, they had an inner and peculiar knowledge of the sensational stories anent Lefèvre and his gang published in the morning newspapers. The ingenuity of modern journalism had not failed to connect the series of crimes which had occurred the previous day, while disclaimers from a bank and a firm of well known stockbrokers, stating that they had no client of the name of "Lefèvre," focused public attention on the amazing person who owned a large house and yet had contrived to destroy it so thoroughly.

Ruffini's arrest was known, too, as well as the scuffle in Curzon Street, "outside the Home Secretary's London residence." One adroit writer, remembering that a man was under remand for purveying a new and exceedingly harmful drug, went into a detailed description of certain phases of the night life of London, and stated categorically that the continental squad of the C. I. D. was particularly active at the moment in its surveillance of the most noted members of the underworld, both men and women.

Sir Arthur Monson and Mr. Winter were thoroughly annoyed when they read this effusion. It was altogether too clever an assumption, for none of the officials conducting the inquiry would breathe a word as to departmental methods to any one connected with the press.

"We cannot guard against this sort of thing, Sir Arthur," said the chief resignedly. "These young gentlemen attend the law courts, and remember how and when certain evidence has been obtained. Though the exact system employed to get it, or the actual source whence it came, may be concealed, they ferret out some of the facts, often from the prisoner when released. All these things are on record in a newspaper's 'library,' where your biography and mine are already written up, ready for instant use if one or other of us retires, or meets a sudden and violent death."

"In this case, wouldn't it be wise to enlist the aid of the press?" mused the commissioner aloud.

"You mean in relation to the facts still withheld?"

"Well, yes. How about a photograph of a 'token,' for instance?"

"Furneaux, who telephoned early to say that he may not put in an appearance today, is dead against any reference to the numbered half crowns."

"But Lefèvre and his crew know that we know?"

"Yes, sir—I admit it; but when Furneaux makes a special request—"

The commissioner laughed.

"Oh, of course," he said. "We just have to do as we're told. Very well! Let us discuss this point fully when he does turn up. Have you any notion as to what he is doing?"

"He wants to roam about in disguise. Probably I shall pass him in the street; but *he* can get hold of *us* quickly enough, if necessary."

Linton, with his two assistants, was instructed to stroll through the main thoroughfares of the West End, and to keep a sharp lookout for those members of the gang whom they knew by sight. The exigencies of the public service forbid an exact description of the way in which the patrol was conducted, or the signals they could adopt when coöperation was called for. However, no such intimate details of detective methods is essential, since that which actually happened was far removed from the rôle allotted to the trio.

XXII

At noon, when Linton was in two minds as to whether he should telephone Curzon Street at all, and, if he did, whether or not he ought to lunch there, he was standing, by arrangement, in front of a popular restaurant near Oxford Circus when a wizened old man, of poverty-stricken appearance, asked him to buy a box of matches. The request was made in the husky accents of the born cockney, but he chanced to glance at the would-be vendor's eyes, and caught a gleam in them that was curiously reminiscent of some one he knew.

Thereupon the voice changed suddenly.

"Excellent!" it cackled. "You have all the makings of a first-rate cop! Listen, and treasure each word. Take that girl out to lunch. Then persuade her to go with you to a private show of a new picture called 'The Volcano' in a theater near the Strand, at half past two. Ask for two seats at the door in the name of Mr. Zedyx—X. Y. Z. backward—and they will be given to you. Look at the picture, but don't discuss it in the theater except with high approval. No matter whom you may see there, or what you may imagine, do nothing whatsoever till you hear from me at the main exit about four o'clock. Tell Jenks and Blenkey to meet you there, too, and close in behind Miss Mainwaring. She will be quite safe, but, if they look after her only, both you and they will know whom to hit if a row starts. If nothing happens, rush the young lady home, and be at the Yard at five o'clock. In case, don't leave her for a yard or a second. Got all that?"

"Yes."

"Then buy a box of matches, and be off."

"As it happens, I am invited to luncheon at Curzon Street."

"Splendid! On your way take a look at St. George's, Hanover Square. It's an ugly but most interesting ecclesiastical edifice."

Linton's well ordered brain was so intent on memorizing Furneaux's instructions, thus insuring their exact fulfillment, that he did not grasp the meaning of the concluding words until he was, in actual fact, gazing at the gaunt exterior of the church in which many of London's fashionable marriages are solemnized. Then he smiled at the conceit, though, truth to tell, he was by no means pleased at the prospect of involving the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring in anything like a "row," howsoever harmless it might be to her personally.

He believed that to the little detective the chase was the thing, no matter who suffered before the quarry was run to earth. Why bring the girl into it? Was there not proof in plenty that the wretches they were pursuing had no shred of mercy in their methods, and would sacrifice a whole theaterful of people if by so doing they could attain their own ends?

He had been taken by surprise in Oxford Circus. Could he possibly have found Furneaux again, he would have refused pointblank to include Miss Mainwaring in the afternoon's program. It was too late to act now. His last glimpse of Furneaux showed the match seller hobbling with decrepit steps into a tube station. At any rate, Linton resolved firmly to act as he thought fit if there was the slightest sign of possible danger to his companion at the cinema performance.

In Bond Street he overtook two men of the continental squad at intervals of forty yards, but, as neither seemed to see him, he, also, looked elsewhere. He could not help wondering why they were sauntering so aimlessly through the well dressed throng which filled the narrow sidewalks at that hour.

Being, as it were, more than ordinarily on the *qui vive,* he noticed, turning into a manicure establishment, a woman whom he associated dimly with his recollections of the housekeeper who did the marketing for Avenue House, Dorking. Should he tell the other men of his suspicion? He halted and glanced back, whereupon the nearest detective smiled and waved him on with a single finger.

So, then, things were moving! That was satisfactory, at least.

It was amusing to note how Mr. Hobbs eyed him, and with what instant decision the butler classified him as belonging to the right set. And the seal was placed at once on an expert's judgment when Linton entered the drawing-room, because Lord Robert Ferris came forward with extended hand, and a hearty—

"Never more surprised in my life, old bean, than when Peggy told me you were coming here to-day. I didn't even know you had ever met the child."

Linton, full to the chin with hopes and fears, could not begin to guess to what extent, if any, the guardsman shared Peggy Mainwaring's fairly ample acquaintance with the topic of the hour. To make matters more difficult, she was not present.

"My meeting with the young lady in question is quite recent in date, and altogether official," he said. "You, as an old friend of the family, have already realized what a pity it is that she should be mixed up in this present excitement."

"Well, yes; but it's something big, I'm told—mines going up in all directions, and incendiary bombs dropping down chimneys, and that sort of thing. It became serious when my battalion was put on a service footing this morning, with one platoon in each company ready to turn out at a moment's notice."

"So the scare has reached the War Office?" said Linton, trying to find some noncommittal comment.

"Yes. I had a deuce of a job to get off this afternoon, but some johnnie in Scotland Yard passed the cheery word to my O. C., and here I am."

At that moment Peggy herself hurried in, brimful of regret for being late.

"Am I dressed properly for a cinema?" she said. "I'm told that Bobby and you are taking me to see some wonderful film, but what's the use of putting on specially glad rags when the whole show is given in the dark?"

"We are rather at cross purposes, Miss Mainwaring," said Linton. "Who told you of a visit to a cinema? I had an idea that the festivity, if it is one, was planned by one man only, and that knowledge of it would be confined to a very small circle."

"Oh, Mr. Furneaux said nothing about that. I told him Bobby was joining us for lunch, and he said you could get three tickets as easily as two."

"I shall not be in the least surprised if it turns out that 'The Volcano' is written and produced by Mr. Charles François Furneaux, of the Criminal Investigation Department. However, he has taken a load off my mind, for I have been more than doubtful whether you ought to go."

"Dash it all!" cried Ferris. "Is Miss Mainwaring running any risk?"

"There is always a chance of such a thing."

"My notion is that some one in Scotland Yard is suffering from a bad attack of nerves," said the guardsman.

"I have not seen any indication of it," was Linton's dry answer.

"Luncheon is ready. I'm sure we're all hungry. After a hefty meal even a volcano won't seem so terrifying!"

Thus Peggy, who dreaded lest Linton might succeed in persuading the other man that she should not be permitted to accompany them to the theater.

"Didn't you say that the detective person wanted your opinion about the propagandist effect of this film?" went on Lord Robert, when they were seated at the dining table.

"Yes," replied Peggy. "He believed I knew so much more about M. Lefèvre's theories than the general public that I should be able to judge how far it might be mischievous."

"Well, that's all right. Don't you agree, Linton?"

"Yes, I suppose so. The truth is that Mr. Furneaux has enlightened Miss Mainwaring rather thoroughly. I was merely given orders, and am carrying them out."

From that instant Linton stifled his doubts. He asked no more questions. Not till long afterward did he learn that Furneaux had pulled the different strings which brought him to the private view of "The Volcano" in company with Peggy and Lord Robert. If the little detective ever wishes to change his profession, he can always earn a competence by manipulating marionettes. On that summer's day in London, his tiny frame and superactive brain were controlling the movements, and even the destinies, of a great many human lay figures.

There was nothing out of the common in the manners or appearance of the crowd that gathered for the private view of "The Volcano." Such a fixture, in the screen world, somewhat resembles a *répétition générale* on the legitimate stage, though the picture, of course, is seen exactly as it will be presented to the public at a later date.

The box office raised no difficulty about the additional seat. Indeed, Linton noticed that the businesslike young woman in charge did not so much as look at him when he mentioned "Mr. Zedyx." They were shown to places in the front row of the gallery—the best possible position, in fact—and, after an orchestral selection of modern Russian music, the lights went out, and the title and other preliminary announcements of the forthcoming piece flickered into brilliance.

"The Volcano" was announced as "an allegory," and the audience was not left in doubt for many minutes as to the nature of the message it conveyed. Our gray old world had been torn asunder so many times already to bring about modern conditions, and the results were so poor, it would seem, that an even greater catastrophe than any yet achieved by volcanic or seismic action—these were akin, it was held—was necessary before the millennium could arrive.

Some thrilling scenes of Etna in eruption were sandwiched between large-type condemnations of society as at present constituted. By devices which Linton could not begin to explain, busy towns and smiling villages were swallowed up by subterranean fires which one had seen gathering volume and fury in the bowels of the earth. Similarly, crowds of diners in fashionable open-air restaurants, the occupants of grand stands on race courses, people entering the Casino at Monte Carlo, and promenaders on the sea front at Deauville—all genuine pictures these, taken in vivid sunshine—were blown into nothingness by the efforts of certain "reformers" who worked secretly in underground dungeons.

Out of a bewildering chaos there soon appeared a new and convincing sequence of events. Just as surely as unseen earth forces broke a whole city into fragments, so did modern civilization melt before the lava stream of what was called the "new freedom" among the nations. A royal procession faded into a march of the unemployed. The glitter of ill earned wealth was replaced by the poverty from which it was wrung. Let any man be rich and honored, he was surely doomed to destruction. Let him be hungry and in rags, he was proclaimed the avenger.

Certain characters, male and female, became recognizable types. The spectator followed the struggle between capital and labor, the representatives of worn-out "laws" and of new social "agreements," with the same breathless interest that a movie audience shows in a race between an express train and a motor car hurrying deadly rivals to the ultimate crash. The inevitableness of the outcome was a striking feature of the performance, which ended as it began, with Etna in convulsion, and with a new Sicily of pretty houses, tenanted by rather scantily clothed human beings, rising in glory out of the ruins.

When the lights were switched on again, a gasp of relief came from the crowded house, and a buzz of excited conversation broke out. Lord Robert Ferris momentarily forgot the embargo placed on disapproving comment, and turned to Peggy Mainwaring with a guffaw, half of anger and half of amusement.

"What frightful tosh!" he cried.

Peggy kicked his ankle.

"Not at all," she said. "It's an awfully clever picture. I want to see it again, heaps of times. I'm sure I missed a lot of minor effects of the utmost subtlety because the main story gripped my attention so closely."

Linton, who had followed the whole production with rapt interest, being convinced that what he was witnessing was a most powerful exposition of M. Lefèvre's pet schemes—in several instances he recognized the definite characteristics of the explosives and fiery gases used—brought his wits back to the instant demand on them.

"You go in front," he muttered to Ferris, as they all three emerged into a crowded gangway. "Keep close to Lord Robert," he added to Peggy. "Don't get separated from him by any one, even if you have to use your elbows. I'll assist, so don't be surprised if I propel you onward with some force."

However, no one interfered with them in any way. The entrance hall was packed, of course, as everybody knows almost every other body in a professional crowd, and loud-voiced opinions concerning the film were alternating with hasty arrangements for impromptu tea parties in neighboring restaurants.

It was a relief to breathe fresh air and see daylight once more.

"Ah!" sighed Peggy, erring in her turn. "This is good! The blessed sunshine drives that horrid volcano out of one's mind!"

Linton saw Jenks and Blenkey near the exit, each taking his job rather seriously, and staring hard at the crowd pouring into the street. They were only looking for Miss Mainwaring and himself, but their steadfast scrutiny seemed to disconcert three men crossing the pavement to a waiting limousine. Linton, suddenly aware that he recognized the walk of two members of the trio, was sorely tempted to dash forward, in total disregard of Furneaux's explicit orders.

Fortunately, he was saved from this unpardonable offense.

The two ex-soldiers, wholly unmindful of their own definite job, exchanged glances and probably words of fiery comprehension, but were so taken by surprise that the three men were inside the car before they sprang at the door with a shout. Blenkey grabbed the handle; but as the car leaped into movement, he reeled back with a dagger thrust through his throat.

"Oh, what is it?" wailed Peggy, who had not failed to notice the actions of her waiting escort.

Linton, trying to convert his two eyes into twenty, shielding her with his body, and holding himself tense for a spring if necessary, whispered over her shoulder:

"I think Lefèvre is in that car, and he may have got away, all because those fellows did not do just as they were told, and no more!"

XXIII

Men were shouting and women screaming, for fifty people at least had witnessed the scurry, and Blenkey, after nearly collapsing, was stanching with a handkerchief the flow of blood from his wound. There had been a sufficiency of black and white gore inside the theater, but this external episode showed the genuine article rather copiously.

A hubbub of loud-voiced orders and revolver shots broke out in the direction whither the car had fled, whereupon the crowd dissolved, some to see what was taking place farther up the street, most to seek safety in flight, and a few to remain where they were, because a number of women fainted outright when the shooting began.

Linton literally could not determine how to act. Every fiber in his body was drawing him to the invisible battle being waged at a little distance, but the iron bonds of discipline kept him immovable. He was not to quit Peggy's side. He was to do nothing whatsoever till he heard from Furneaux at the main exit. It was an odd moment for such a thought, but the fire raging in heart and brain reminded him of the pent-up volcano of the picture.

Peggy, thoroughly frightened by Blenkey's ghastly aspect, was clinging to Linton's left arm, and brokenly asking for an explanation which he could not give. Lord Robert Ferris was torn between annoyance at the girl's obvious confidence that Linton would shield her from harm and a natural desire to find out "what all the bally row was about."

At that moment a strident American voice came from the doorway.

"Gee! So this is London! Puts me right back into little old Noo York!"

"Guess some crooks are shooting up the burg," agreed another voice.

"Wonder if it's an advertising stunt for 'The Volcano,'" said the first speaker.

"Nit! They won't stand for that sort of thing over here. And real lead is flying. Look at that!"

"That" was a plate glass window across the street starred by a stray bullet.

Then Furneaux appeared, natty as ever, in blue serge suit, straw hat, brown shoes, with shirt, collar, tie, and socks in complementary shades. First he pounced on Jenks, who was supplying Blenkey with a second handkerchief.

"Take him to Charing Cross Hospital," he hissed, "and get the house surgeon to conceal him with sticking plaster. Then, if the doctor decides to cut the throats of both of you, he will rid the world of a pair of idiots. You've spoiled a neat thing!"

He whirled round on Linton.

"Glad to see that you, at any rate, have stuck to your guns. Hop it, quick! You'll find a taxi opposite the Savoy, or nearer. Be at headquarters at five sharp."

Peggy began to recover, and, of course, to expostulate because she was hurried away; but the men were obdurate. It was impossible to determine what had taken place during the shooting affray. Thousands of people blocked the street in that direction, and were yielding slowly to the pressure of a dozen mounted police. This was a sure signal of the end of the disturbance. In a few minutes the regular flow of traffic would be resumed.

So it came to pass that Linton swallowed a cup of tea in Curzon Street and hurried away, after promising by all his gods to telephone Miss Mainwaring at the earliest possible moment.

He reached New Scotland Yard at the appointed time, and was greatly impressed by the undisturbed calm that reigned in its courtyard. There was not the slightest sign of any activity out of the common. It is normally a quiet place in the afternoon, and on this occasion its repose was only enhanced by the presence of a couple of private cars, one of which Linton recognized as the chief's.

He was halted at the entrance, and his explanation that he was bidden to attend a "conference" was coldly received.

"Take a seat in the waiting room, sir," said a stolid constable. "I'll call you when Mr. Winter gives permission."

For a few seconds Linton was angry. Then he laughed. Was it not just that quality of British phlegm which had given England her place in the world? Sheldon came to his aid, however. A number of journalists gathered in the room were panting like hounds on a leash, and Sheldon looked in to say that the chief would see them at half past five exactly. He crooked a finger at Linton.

"Sorry you were held up," he said, as they passed along a corridor to the lift. "It can't be helped. Everybody who comes here tries to bluff the doorkeeper, so, if the prime minister himself should call, he would be pushed into the waiting room."

In the chief's office were gathered Sir Arthur Monson, Furneaux, two members of the continental squad, Winter himself, and a man and woman, the former handcuffed. The moment Linton entered, he knew that the companion of "*mon vieux*" at Box Hill and the housekeeper at Avenue House were accounted for.

Mr. Winter looked up from a sheet of foolscap on which he was writing.

"Ah, Inspector Linton!" he said, in an oddly matter-of-fact way. "Have you seen either or both of these people before?"

In equally official tones Linton told where and when he *had* seen them.

Winter gazed sternly at the prisoners.

"Georg Moskovitch and Erminia Schwartz," he said, "you are charged, individually and collectively, with being engaged in a conspiracy against the state which has resulted in the murder of many innocent people and the destruction of property by explosives and incendiarism. There will be other charges against both of you, when the evidence in our possession is considered and sifted. It is my duty now to warn you that anything you may say in answer to the present charges will be taken down in writing, and may be used in evidence against you on your trial. Do you wish to make any statement?"

"No," growled the man.

The woman yielded suddenly to hysteria, and protested in broken English that she was only a servant. Winter touched a bell. When a constable came, he told him to have the pair taken separately to Bow Street, and gave him a written memorandum of the entries for the charge sheet.

"And now," said the chief commissioner, rising from his chair with a jerk when the closing of an outer door had cut off Erminia Schwartz's lamentations, "I would like to hear what has really happened."

He spoke like one who was not only irritated but nervous. Winter seemed to pay no heed to the great man's displeasure. He merely nodded at Furneaux.

"The story is yours, Charles," he said. "Tell it."

Furneaux leaned forward in his chair.

"I wish you'd smoke," he cried, as if in vexation. "The atmosphere is artificial unless you are poisoning the air with one of your vile Havanas!"

Sir Arthur wriggled, but controlled himself. He even took a cigar from the box proffered by Winter. Sheldon was a cigarette smoker. The others preferred their pipes.

The two windows were wide open. From the Embankment came the rattle of the London County Council tram cars and the whir of many taxis. London was going homeward from the city. What earthly chance, thought Linton, had Lefèvre and his fellow murderers of disturbing the poise of a people who remained so blandly indifferent alike to the wild tenets of the revolutionaries and the ghastly fate which threatened them?

"In this affair," began the diminutive speaker, "we've had so much good luck that we should not be surprised at to-day's hitch. Good luck! *'Cré nom!* Hundreds, it may be thousands, might have died if Miss Mainwaring hadn't spotted that half crown rolling across the road, if Mr. Linton had failed to discover the Dorking rendezvous, if he hadn't brought Jenks here last night, and, above all, if two of the unwashed had not gone to Curzon Street at eleven o'clock to see Lord Copmanthorpe's house blown sky high. I interviewed those warriors in Vine Street about midnight, and found that one of them had been a stage carpenter in a motion-picture studio—the very place where 'The Volcano' was made, or put together, for many of its best effects were bought from the film library of one of the great topical companies. That gave me the first definite pointer to the prospective whereabouts of the man whom we knew as M. Lefèvre, because the manager of the studio, a very decent fellow, who had dismissed the gentleman in Vine Street for drunkenness, assured me that the person who ordered and paid for the picture meant to attend the private view, being greatly concerned as to its effect on a professional audience. He, the said manager, was not altogether gratified by his association with the production. He regarded it as a dangerous undertaking, and fully expected its condemnation by the censor of films. I lay stress on this, because the more I heard of the matter about nine o'clock this morning, the more convinced I was that Lefèvre had a finger in the pie. I used Mr. Linton's description of '*mon vieux,*' and the studio man recognized it at once."

He paused, perhaps purposely, and Linton ventured to break in.

"The description was really due to Miss Mainwaring's close observation," he said.

"Yes," agreed Furneaux. "That girl is certainly a marvel!"

Linton colored a little at that, and resolved to hold his tongue unless specifically appealed to.

"The Home Office analyst, however, was the man who actually revealed M. Lefèvre's identity, though he himself is not aware of the fact yet," went on the detective. "I saw him at half past nine, while he was breakfasting, and he told me that the analysis of the drug purveyed by 'the doctor,' samples of which were already in our possession, had puzzled the laboratory experts. It was not a preparation of coal tar, but was rather suggestive of the synthesis of conine, from formaldehyde and ammonia under the action of light, indicating the way in which these alkaloids are formed in living plants. If some unknown catalyst were discovered, the process of manufacture by artificial light and heat would be comparatively simple."

"What might a catalyst be?" inquired Sir Arthur.

"I haven't the least notion, sir. I've had no time to look in the dictionary."

Linton thought he might take another chance.

"It is a chemical agent which, without undergoing any change itself, induces chemical change in other bodies," he said.

"Then there have been several catalysts used in this inquiry," said Furneaux suavely. "To continue, it was merely a good guess to connect such a process with the horticultural experiments ostensibly carried out by M. Lefèvre at Dorking, so I asked our expert for the names of a few men who might have investigated this abstruse branch of science. He thought there was only one great chemist likely to be interested, a French-speaking Pole named Raoul David, but he, unfortunately, had become almost insane, and could no longer be regarded as a serious analyst. In the library of the Royal Society I found a photograph of Raoul David, and it measured up exactly to the facial characteristics of Jules Lefèvre."

Winter whistled, blowing some smoke across the table.

"Of course," purred Furneaux, "I might have seen David's portrait in many other haunts of knowledge, but, for reasons which my respected chief appreciates fully, I chose the rooms of the Royal Society. Thenceforth, it was a matter of ten minutes to ascertain that David lived near Russell Square, and I had the good fortune to see him leaving his house. By that time I was disguised, so our colleagues here"—he glanced at the two members of the continental branch—"took up the trail to a restaurant and the theater. The other pair were already on the track of the woman and Moskovitch, who left the house soon after eleven o'clock, and they are now searching the place for documents. I have little doubt we shall soon have full details of the complete organization."

"This probably means a great many arrests," put in Winter.

The speaker glanced at Furneaux, and Linton was certain that the remark was simply a *ballon d'essai* meant for the commissioner, who took it seriously.

"Grab the whole gang!" he said with much gusto.

"The center of interest shifted at once to the cinema theater," went on Furneaux suavely. "Mr. Winter's arrangements were, of course, admirable. We knew our men by this time, and it was planned to arrest them quite unexpectedly when their car was stopped, apparently by accident, some forty yards higher up the narrow street; but fate, in the persons of Blenkey and Jenks, intervened. Blenkey recognized David, while Jenks knew another of the trio as a communist speaker who had foretold last night's explosions, which were probably postponed for a week or longer owing to some disruption of their projects resulting from the Dorking affair. So David and the others realized that they were in a trap, and it is simply a miracle not only that Blenkey was not killed, but that our own ranks did not suffer many casualties. Their car dashed through the crowd, mounted the sidewalk when the block in the roadway was seen, charged the men whose duty it was to stop them, and whirled around into a side street. They began shooting, too, and we have three men hit, but not dangerously. A woman was killed by being run over, and two bystanders were so badly injured that they are detained in the hospital. The car got away, and, of course, has not been parked in the neighborhood of Russell Square. In fact, unless we are willing to see one of the main roads leading to the west of England strewed with the bodies of policemen, I suggest that our next meeting with M. Raoul David, alias Jules Lefèvre, should take place in a remote part of Exmoor."

"Exmoor!" repeated the commissioner, in sheer astonishment.

"Yes, sir." Now it was Winter who answered. "The home office analyst gave thought to the recent history of M. Raoul David after Mr. Furneaux left him this morning. Being a man of precise habit, he took time to check his theories, and thus, unfortunately, got me on the phone this afternoon at the very moment when I was trying to perfect our arrangements for the arrests outside the cinema theater. I had to decide in an instant whether or not to listen. Rightly or wrongly, I elected to hear what he had to say, because his statement struck me as opening up a clear road through the jungle of uncertainties in which we have been wandering."

He hesitated and glanced at a clock. The time was twenty minutes past five.

"The Great Western people have promised to have a special train in readiness at Paddington at seven o'clock," he explained. "They undertake to set us down at a little wayside station on Exmoor a few minutes after midnight. How long will it take you to pack a bag, Mr. Linton?"

"It is packed already, sir," came the prompt answer.

"Good! We can pick it up on our way. Now I want the members of the staff to listen carefully to the details supplied by the home office man. It is not necessary to take notes. All you need is a general acquaintance with the subject, which may help in individual cases as arrests continue to be made to-night in London. M. David is nominally consulting chemist to a company known as Peat and By-Products Low Temperature Distillers, Limited, which, with a capital of fifty thousand pounds, is properly registered at Somerset House. The process is in active operation on Exmoor, and it is quite probable that not a man regularly employed in the extensive plant there is aware of its real nature, for large quantities of the residual charcoal are shipped from Barnstaple to the manufacturers of steel and iron in South Wales. M. David, the brain behind the enterprise, goes there occasionally. We can only guess at his purpose, but analysis of the mysterious drug now being circulated so largely in this city and elsewhere makes the guess almost a scientific thesis. A dilute solution of ammonia and carbon dioxide is exposed to sunlight in a thin sheet, so as to present the greatest possible surface. This solution holds a green dye, to permit of complete absorption of the rays of light. Conine and many other substances have been obtained by this means. David has discovered a catalyst which directs the chemical action from conine to cocaine. There is reason to believe that he extracts both the green dye and the catalyst from a particular variety of seaweed found near Mounts Bay, Cornwall, and in the Scilly Isles. As a matter of fact, the Exmoor company purchases large quantities of this weed, which has the property of coloring ammoniacal solutions green, and is in stable combination with a complex organic salt containing both iodine and palladium."

Winter paused for a few seconds, not because he was at a loss for words, but to search for a memorandum. It amused Linton to note the varying expressions on the circle of intent faces. Furneaux's wizened features resembled a carved ivory mask. The others were memorizing strange words. The commissioner was frankly flabbergasted. His natural annoyance at the extraordinary escape of the master criminal that afternoon was now altogether eclipsed by the knowledge that the preparation of a potent and almost deadly drug could be carried on under the very eyes of the authorities, so to speak.

"I am sorry to interrupt," he said, "but can you tell me how long the Peat, *et cetera*, Distillers have been at work?"

"Nearly twelve months," replied Winter, who had now found the paper he wanted. "It is estimated that the Exmoor plant is capable of producing ten tons of ammonium carbonate in crystals daily. This corresponds to the enormous output of five tons of cocaine daily, if one applies that general description to the drug of which we have obtained samples. This is the exact amount needed to effect the moral deterioration of England, allowing two grains *per capita* each day for thirty-five millions of people. The drug is soluble in fats, and could be introduced into many forms of food."

"But—" began Sir Arthur.

"It is being done already, sir," said Winter firmly. "A food preservative containing it is about to be placed on the market, and the nature of the compound would not have been suspected were it not that the chemical tests of the actual drug and the preservative compound reacted to the same agents. This fact put our analysts on the track. I have here"—he indicated a typed sheet—"a detailed statement of the probable process of manufacture, but time does not permit of discussion to-day. Inspector Sheldon will have other copies made, and these will be available for comparison with memoranda obtained from the Russell Square house or elsewhere."

"I think I would like to go with you to-night," said the commissioner suddenly.

"I hope you will reconsider that, sir," replied Winter, with equal promptitude. "No one in the department can speak with your authority, and decisions of grave importance may be called for repeatedly during the next few hours. It is useless to look to the Home Office in this matter. They do not appreciate either the extent of the danger or its tremendous issues. I myself, this very afternoon, underestimated David's resourcefulness, or he would not have slipped through our fingers. This time there must be no mistake, either here or in Devonshire."

Sir Arthur's mouth twisted in a crooked smile. He knew well why the executive head of the C. I. D. did not want him. During the next twelve hours things might be done on Exmoor of which he could not possibly approve, if present, but of which he could blandly deny the least cognizance.

"Very well," he said. "You will want to send some telegrams in my name, I suppose?"

"Sheldon has the text ready, sir. If you approve, they should be dispatched at once. Of course, I shall be glad to know the nature of any alterations you may deem necessary. One word in conclusion, gentlemen. No one in London or elsewhere outside this room is aware of the circumstances I have set forth so hurriedly. Even my typists do not understand the purport of the memoranda they have prepared, and your knowledge must not go beyond these four walls."

Linton found Furneaux grinning at him. It was as if the little man had said:

"This is where the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring is left out in the cold. And won't you catch it, my lad, when she hears what has happened?"

(To be concluded in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*)*

Homelike Delicatessen

THE STORY OF A BUSINESS TRANSACTION WITH SEVERAL PECULIAR FEATURES

By Ralph E. Mooney

MICHAEL HALE noted with satisfaction that the scrubbing brush had raised a great quantity of dirt. He wiped it up, cocking his head to make sure that he left the edge of the clean area a straight line. When a trickle of water ran into unwashed territory, he sniffed in annoyance.

" Mike!"

This was a woman's voice, complaining and sad, yet domineering. Hale turned with a frown.

" Yes, ma'am?"

" Come here," directed the voice. " Come here when I call. Don't stand and yell at me!"

He did not respond immediately, but stood looking around the shop. It was called the Homelike Delicatessen.

" That's a laugh," he muttered, as he moved toward a partition ten or twelve feet to the rear of the counter he had been cleaning. " It's a hell of a place!"

He was not far wrong. The floor of the Homelike Delicatessen was dirty. Angles and corners were made round by accumulations of particularly black filth. The glass show cases were hazy with finger prints. Packages, on shelves along the walls, were covered with brown spots, large and small. A steaming pan, which warmed a tray of hot meats, sent forth a vapor that made breathing hard and raised drops of moisture wherever it touched glass or metal.

Mike went to an opening in the partition and pushed aside a curtain of heavy—also sticky—green plush. He entered a section which was a trifle larger in floor space than the shop proper, but which was divided into a kitchen, a storeroom, a bedroom, and another compartment — perhaps it was a " settin' room," as Mrs. Boyd called it. Such names are arbitrary.

The kitchen, being at the rear on the left side of the building, was dimly lighted through barred windows. The storeroom, forward of it, was not lighted at all. Michael had investigated the storeroom, and had found that it was better so. Light created too much excitement in there.

The bedroom, at the rear on the right side of the building, was faintly lit—on sunny days—while the so-called sitting room, adjoining, gave one the impression that it was filled with fog, even when the electric light was on.

Mrs. Boyd was in the sitting room, with a sore-eyed dog curled up beside her. She had removed her shoes, and was easing her feet upon a chair. A novel lay open upon her lap. She read novels interminably, Michael had observed, but her intellectual pursuits left no mark upon her exterior.

Her face was cross and blank. At the moment, it was dirty. It had been dirty when Michael first came to the place, the day before. Her hair was partly bunched under a pre-war bit of negligee called, we believe, a boudoir cap. It was not wholly contained in this cap, and had not been so the day before. Her body was covered with a black silk shirt waist—two buttons missing — and a woolly black skirt — two hooks missing. All had been missing the day before.

She rolled petulant eyes upon Michael. They were large eyes, with a good deal of animal fire in them.

" Just because we're partners," she said, " is no reason why you shouldn't act like a gentleman. It ain't polite to make a lady holler at you."

" I'm trying to work down through the real estate and see the color of that front counter," returned Michael, with matter-of-fact bluntness.

"The counter's clean enough," answered Mrs. Boyd. "We got other things to worry about. The rent's due to-day."

Michael blinked, and a hint of pallor came into his cheeks. He was a little man, scarcely five feet in height, with curly black hair and a black mustache that covered all of his upper lip. His face and body had a queer way of expressing the thought that dominated him.

"When I bought in here," he answered in a puzzled monotone, "the broker said things like the rent was to come out of the partnership money."

Mrs. Boyd made an impatient gesture.

"I don't care what he said," she snapped. "I'm ten dollars short on the rent, and we got to pay it."

Michael Hale stood blinking at the electric light. His shoulders sagged a little.

"Haven't you got it?" pursued Mrs. Boyd. "You must have ten dollars."

Michael turned his eyes upon her. There was a simple incredulity in them that she found provoking. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Boyd's conscience was uneasy, so that she could be provoked without difficulty.

"Oh, yes," replied Michael. "I've got it. I'll pay it, I guess."

"Well, you better take it down to Mr. Hardesty right away," she warned. Her tone hinted that he had been overlong about the matter. "The balance of it is in that blue envelope on my desk."

Mike said nothing more, but took up the blue envelope and went to the front of the shop. He put on his coat and hat—worn objects, but markedly neat and well brushed—and set his scrub bucket under the counter. He noted that the flame under the steaming pan was too high, and stooped to turn down the gas. As he did so, the shop door opened and a brisk voice called:

"Good afternoon, Hale!"

Michael did not straighten for a moment, but remained crouched, like a boy fearing punishment. A haunted look came on his features.

It was inevitable that he should return the greeting, of course. The visitor approached the counter, clapping his hands together smartly and rubbing them.

"Howdydo, Mr. Donaldson?" Michael acknowledged.

II

Mr. Donaldson, at first glance, was a striking figure. He gave an airy impression that he was a man of large finances. His dark gray suit was the sort of suit that middle-aged men of wealth were wearing. His hat matched it. He wore a close-clipped mustache, and was smoking a cigar with careless, free-handed flourishes.

It was only when you met Mr. Donaldson for the second time, as Michael was meeting him, that you noticed discrepancies. Yellow stain was seeping out from inside the neck of his collar and down over the outer slope. His shoes were wrinkled like the skin of an aged negro, and were canted over, so that he stood with ankles bowed. His nails were dirty and overgrown with purple flesh, and there was a trace of oil on his forehead and cheeks.

Having completed the rubbing of his hands, Mr. Donaldson placed them both on the counter and faced Michael Hale, smiling around the tip of his cigar.

"Well!" he said. "You've found everything satisfactory?"

Hale now betrayed the main factor in his make-up. He stood motionless, looking at Donaldson for a considerable time. A light frown came upon his brow and disappeared. An expression of certainty replaced it, and his mustache made one or two movements preparatory to a speech.

Quite obviously, he had wrestled with Donaldson's words, debating their meaning one by one, and had finally decided what to say. Michael Hale was slow-minded. He found his tongue an awkward implement to handle.

"I suppose so," was the answer he achieved.

Donaldson went on at once.

"The inventory was correct? The statement of the business, also? The condition of affairs was what I represented it to be? Quite so! I knew you would find nothing changed. Mrs. Boyd is to be trusted, Hale. I have always found her scrupulously honest. And—well, is Mrs. Boyd here?"

Hale nodded, while he pondered Donaldson's other questions. Donaldson raised his voice.

"Oh, Mrs. Boyd!" he called.

"I'm coming," was the answer from beyond the partition.

There was no hint that she was displeased with Donaldson's ungentlemanly action in shouting to her—no hint that he would have done better to present himself in the sitting room.

"Here I am," the lady announced, entering the shop, patting and smoothing the forward surfaces of her garments.

Mr. Donaldson looked her full in the eye in an expressive way. Mrs. Boyd returned the stare without change of countenance. Although nothing was said, both seemed there and then to come to an agreement on some matter which was important and satisfactory.

Michael, standing apart like a small statue, with black eyes gleaming, was not admitted to membership in the alliance.

" Hale is thoroughly satisfied," averred Donaldson. " I was sure he would be."

Mrs. Boyd nodded. Mr. Donaldson nodded. They eyed Hale so insistently that he nodded, too.

" And that," continued Donaldson, " brings us to the final stage of the transaction. You have merely to pay the balance of fifty dollars, Hale, and the agreement will go into effect."

Hale's absorption of this was so slow that Donaldson became impatient.

" The price of the half interest in the store was to be one hundred dollars cash and twenty-five dollars a week for four weeks. The smaller payments, of course, were to come from your share of the earnings. Do you follow me?"

As Donaldson and Mrs. Boyd nodded again, Hale mechanically nodded with them.

" Now," summed up Donaldson, " at my suggestion, you paid fifty dollars down and reserved the right to pay the balance of the cash required after you had inspected the premises. Therefore, all that is necessary is for you to pay me fifty dollars and take my receipt for it. You will then hold clear title to your partnership."

Hale pushed his hat back on his head and dropped his arms at his side, but made no move to produce fifty dollars.

" Don't you understand?" cried Donaldson. " For goodness' sake, don't you remember our agreement?"

The little man spoke mildly.

" You said the rent was to come out of the store money," he declared.

Donaldson gave Mrs. Boyd a puzzled glance.

" Oh, my Lord!" she complained. " I was ten dollars short this morning, and I asked him to make it up, and he's been yelling like a stuck pig about it!"

Mr. Donaldson uttered a crisp laugh. He appeared to be greatly amused.

" Oh, I see!" he nodded. " A loan—a mere loan, of course. Hale, you're not actually paying that ten dollars on the rent. You are lending it to Mrs. Boyd. Come, now, I will write the receipt form while you are getting the money ready. Then the deal will be settled."

Michael shook his head.

" I don't think," he said, " I don't think I want to pay out any more money just yet."

Mr. Donaldson looked shocked. His expression indicated that he had encountered this sort of rogue before, and knew how to deal with him.

" I'm sorry, Mr. Hale, but you have made an agreement, and you must stick to it. There is nothing to do but pay the money. You have said that you found everything as represented."

" No," said Michael. " I think I ought to have more time."

Mrs. Boyd uttered a cry of protest. Donaldson became haughty.

" I should be sorry to be compelled to call a policeman, Hale," he said; " but I shall certainly do so if you do not pay. The agreement was explicit. The money is due now."

Donaldson took a step toward the door. Then he waited, in stern silence. Michael flushed, and seemed to lose control of himself. Finally he spoke apologetically.

" Oh, well, I'll pay it," he said.

Donaldson's eyes gleamed and leaped to meet those of Mrs. Boyd.

" Very well," he said.

Moving slowly, like a man benumbed, Hale produced fifty dollars and gave it over. The signing of a receipt took place in a fraction of a second, and Mr. Donaldson straightened himself, sighing heavily.

" I'm sure," said Mrs. Boyd, with a sneer, " that he can quit any time he wants to. I don't want him here, if he doesn't want to stay."

Donaldson raised his hand.

" So long as he complies with his agreement, Mrs. Boyd, he may do as he wishes; but I intend to see that he does not evade its terms. Now remember, Hale, this only completes the cash payment. You must be ready to deliver twenty-five dollars a week for four weeks, or your investment here is forfeited. There is to be no temporizing or seeking of delay."

As Michael did not reply, Donaldson was again moved to speak sharply.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," replied Michael.

Donaldson nodded.

"Very well! As I see it, the matter is concluded. I am very glad to have been the intermediary in it. I feel that I have done both of you a service. Mrs. Boyd, by putting your affairs in my hands, you have gained a willing partner. Mr. Hale, you do not seem to appreciate that by coming to me you have been enabled to buy your way into an established business which has infinite possibilities. Good afternoon, Mr. Hale. Good afternoon, Mrs. Boyd."

"Wait a minute!"

Mrs. Boyd interrupted the departing visitor. He returned, greatly amused over his absent-mindedness.

"Of course," he chuckled, "I was carrying off the money. Rather suspicious, eh? Here you are, Mrs. Boyd!"

He counted the bills that Hale had given him, and handed several to Mrs. Boyd. The division was accomplished so quickly that one might have suspected it to be upon a half and half basis, but Hale had no opportunity to make certain of this. Donaldson flipped his share of the money about his forefinger, and drove it into his hip pocket with a lightning motion. Mrs. Boyd snatched at the remaining bills and crumpled them in her palm, while her eyes followed Donaldson's movements with a certain anxiety.

"Good afternoon," repeated the intermediary.

They watched him depart. Mrs. Boyd moved away toward her sitting room, clutching her money and glaring at Michael.

"You better hurry down with that rent," she admonished, as she pushed aside the sticky curtain. "It's three days late now."

Out of sight, she smoothed out the bank notes and smirked at them.

III

It was late in the afternoon when Michael entered the office of the landlord of the Homelike Delicatessen. Mr. Hardesty was red-faced and large. His hair had not been cut for a matter of six weeks or so. He took the money from Mrs. Boyd's envelope, and looked Michael over coldly.

"I don't see why that woman can't have her rent ready on time," he complained.

Michael nodded penitently.

"She's got the best location in this city," grumbled Hardesty. "Right in the center of five blocks of apartments, and no competition at all. You tell her this is the last time, hear? If it happens again next month, I'll give her notice to vacate. What she needs is a little hustle—that's all. People have to hustle in this world if they want to get by."

"Yes, sir," said Michael gravely.

"A hustler," grumbled Mr. Hardesty, "could take that store and make it pay two hundred a week. I'll bet she's never done twenty-five clear profit since she's been there!"

Michael set out for the store again. He walked with hanging head, and his pace constantly became slower. At last he stopped and seated himself on a bench in a small park, to think about things. It was necessary for him to do important thinking alone. He could not get clear ideas when others were present.

With his hat removed, and one hand scratching his curly head, he looked like a small boy. There was something boyish, too, in his dejected attitude; but he was not exactly young. Thirty-six years had passed since he came into the world, and twenty-one since he left the orphan asylum that was his first home. He had worked as a laborer and carpenter's apprentice; later, as a camp cook and ship's cook. He had been ten years at sea.

The Metropolitan Business Exchange had been most impressive as he waited in a small inclosure that was marked out by brass rails, with the newspaper advertisement headed "Business Opportunities" in his hand. Half a dozen young men, wearing silk collars and delicately tinted cravats, worked beyond the railing—exchanging business, probably. Three stenographers assisted them. When Donaldson came from a small private office, a subtle executive force emanated from him which seemed to dominate the workers. Cheerfully, Michael had confessed his desire to get into the restaurant business.

"I got some money saved, and I picked up a recipe for a salad in Marseilles that should make a fortune for me over here."

"Of course, of course!" Donaldson had agreed. "I don't doubt it will. Success, Mr. Hale, is merely a question of industry and perseverance. This city is rich in its rewards to capable men."

Not until he had paid half the money for his partnership, sight unseen, did he begin to awaken. It seemed plausible that he was making the payment before they left the office merely as a matter of convenience to Mr. Donaldson, but Mr. Donaldson's nails, collar, and shoes were less plausible. Also, at a time when Michael happened to be passing through the outer office, one of the supposed clerks had answered a telephone call.

"Kamko Machinery Company," he had stated. "Mr. Reeves talking. Eh? Oh, certainly, old man, I forgot all about it. Well, say—let's see—I'll have it by the 15th, sure. You call me then, will you, and remind me, so I can send you a check?"

"Don't you work for the Metropolitan Business Exchange?" Michael asked, as the telephone receiver was replaced.

Mr. Reeves shook his head with an air of deprecation.

"No, old man, I merely happen to have desk room in here. Donaldson rented me this space until I could get a new line established in the city. I expect to take my own offices soon."

Another telephone bell rang.

"Papo Sanitary Towel Service," announced a voice. "Mr. Bilcox speaking."

Thinking it over on the park bench, Michael wriggled impatiently. Why was he so slow in dealing with people? Why had he been unable to act positively when he perceived the sort of trap into which he was falling?

"I got to make up my mind," he muttered. "I got to make up mind what to do. I only got twelve dollars left."

Daylight faded, and the street lights came on, but still he sat with head bowed, shifting his position now and again. At last, he arose with a weary shake of his head.

"No use!" he sighed. "I'll make it up to-night."

Returning to the Homelike Delicatessen, he was assaulted by a burst of steam from the double boiler and a stuffy odor from Mrs. Boyd's living quarters.

"Who is it?" was shrieked from the sitting room.

"Me," answered Michael.

"Well, for Heaven's sake, why didn't you take till next week? I've had to get up and wait on half a dozen people since you left. What kind of way is that to act?"

Michael did not answer. He merely turned resentful eyes in the direction of Mrs. Boyd as he removed his coat and hat and sought out his scrubbing utensils. A few more words of berating came from beyond the partition. Michael soaped the brush and set to work upon the counter.

Exercise evidently aided thought, for after a few moments he began talking to himself again.

"She's got my money, and that's as much as she's a right to."

He repeated this several times. Finally, Mrs. Boyd appeared.

"Eight o'clock," she said.

"Yeah?" asked Hale.

"It's time to close."

"Ain't this pretty early?"

"I don't know whether it's early or not, but I can't go to bed while you're here, and I ain't going to sit up any longer. I wouldn't do it for the King of England!"

Michael nodded, and got his hat and coat.

"Well, good night," he said.

IV

MICHAEL came wide awake at daybreak, as a sea cook should. After stretching luxuriously and rubbing his eyes, he sat on the edge of his bed, with his chin resting on the palm of his hand.

"Now," he said to himself, "let's see!"

He wriggled desperately many times, but he made some progress. As the light cleared, it revealed him with set teeth and determined eyes.

"'At's the stuff!" he whispered. "'At's the stuff!"

More wriggling.

"Think up things to say, and stand by with them. 'At's the stuff!"

More concentration.

"Now, f'r instance—f'r instance—well, she tells me not to do something, and I say, 'How d'you get that way? I'm your partner.' Then—let's see—she talks about calling an officer. Donaldson put that in her mind. Well, she does, and I say—oh, brother, this is a lulu! I say, 'Well, all right, an officer will just make you give me my money back.' That 'll knock her cold. She'll come near fainting."

He spent an hour or more concocting repartee and elaborating his scheme of action. He kept at it until he had gone all around the situation. Then he went to his washstand and lathered his face for shaving. His mustache was soon reduced to a mirth-provoking islet in a sea of foam, but his eyes were cold and penetrating.

At half past six, he created a disturbance at the entrance of the Homelike Delicatessen. When Mrs. Boyd appeared, wearing a flowered wrapper, he tapped a peremptory signal on the glass of the street door. She opened it a little way.

"What do you want here so early?" she demanded. "You go back where you—"

"Don't we try to catch the breakfast trade?" interrupted Michael, thrusting his chin forward.

"There ain't any."

She attempted to close the door, but found Michael blocking it with his foot.

"How do you know, if you're never up?" he inquired.

Mrs. Boyd gasped. She pushed fiercely on the door.

"What call you got to talk to me that way? Take your foot out o' there and let me close this. You can't get in here till half past eight!"

Michael answered with a lunge which swept her aside. He poked a finger at her dictatorially.

"Keep quiet now," he warned. "I'm partner here, and I guess I got some rights. After this you're going to give me a key, and we're going to open at half past six—get me?"

"You get out of here!" she shrieked. "What if you are my partner? You got no rights to come in outside of hours!"

"Haven't I?" queried Michael.

"No, you haven't. Get out of here!"

"I ain't going," he announced. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll show you, you dirty little bum! I'll soon show you! I'm going to call an officer!"

"I knew you'd say that," triumphed Michael. "All right — go call one, and we'll go to see a judge, and he'll tell you either to give me my rights as a partner or to give me my money back. Either way will suit me. I'd rather have it back, if you ask me."

At this, Mrs. Boyd started hastily toward the partition.

"You wait," she sobbed. "You wait till I get some clothes on. I'll show you what I'll do!"

She disappeared while talking. Michael frowned at his reflection in the show cases.

"Hey!" he called. "Wait a minute! Come back here!"

This was quite effective. Mrs. Boyd came furiously through the partition.

"Have you been drinking?" she demanded. "Yelling at me like—"

Hale seated himself on the counter.

"You listen to me," he said. "I want to tell you something. I'm a business man, I am, and I got business ways. Now, you've told me about being left a widow a couple of years ago. You're just a poor woman, all alone and helpless, that don't know much about business."

"Don't I?" she sneered. "Oh, don't I?"

"No," said Hale, "you don't. How could any woman that's been left alone find out right off all the things we got to know in business?"

She hesitated.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Well," said Hale, "the way I see it, you don't understand what a hard battle it is. You got to be up early and late to do anything. The main thing is, this is a good stand, and there ain't no reason why it won't make us a lot of money, if it's handled right."

"You're crazy!" she rebelled.

"Am I? Well, you just keep out of my way and wait and see."

"Keep out of your way? Keep out of your way? I'd like to see myself! I'm going to do as I please."

Hale dropped down off the counter and shrugged his shoulders.

"No, you're not," he proclaimed; "or I'll call in the law and make you give me my money back."

Again the threat caused a precipitate retreat. Michael set to work in the forward part of the store while Mrs. Boyd shrieked at him from her dressing room at intervals. He paid no attention to her efforts. Before long there came a sound of frizzling grease, which indicated that his partner was getting breakfast.

With a stealthy glance rearward and an accurate gauging of sound, Michael seized a hammer and hurried to a point near the front door.

"Le's see now," he speculated. "She'll try to make me put it down again, but I won't do it. I'll spring the pipe dream the rent man gave me. That 'll fix it. Say two hundred dollars to her, and she'll want it so bad she won't know what to do."

Stooping, he inserted the prongs of the hammer under the edge of one of the strips of linoleum that covered the floor. A moment later he had ripped it loose all the way to the counter, and was starting another strip. He made swift progress, and when Mrs. Boyd came hurtling from the rear, called by the sound of destruction, the floor covering lay in dingy billows.

She uttered a scream.

"What are you doing, you lunatic?"

"Why, I'm tearing up this old linoleum," Michael explained. "It's a sight! Honest, it's enough to turn a customer's appetite. After I get through scrubbing in here, we'll have a floor as white as that stone outside. You'll like it."

"You take that hammer and nail that down again. You start right now and fix that—"

"Wait a minute," he interrupted. "Just let me alone, and I'll have this store making two hundred dollars a week. I guess you'd like that, wouldn't you? Of course you would."

Her mouth fell open. She made several attempts to speak, but achieved only a few incoherent sounds. Meanwhile, Michael took up a roll of the discarded floor covering and went past her toward the scrap pile at the back of the building.

V

Michael had solved the problem of handling Mrs. Boyd. He followed his victory cleverly, tormenting her with visions of two hundred dollars a week and with threats of forcing her to disgorge what she had taken from him. He kept her mind on a dead center.

Meanwhile, he cleaned woodwork with lye and soap. He polished metal. He established reforms in the handling of cash, and installed a peculiar rudimentary system of bookkeeping. He restocked the shelves. He even took over the cooking, after tasting one of Mrs. Boyd's half done roasts—an act which should have been beneath the dignity of a gentleman—and informing her that it was not fit to eat.

On the seventh day of his regency, Mrs. Boyd slipped out through the rear entrance of the store and called Mr. Donaldson on the telephone.

"You come out here right away," she sobbed. "Don't call me in there with him, but come back in the settin' room and talk to me."

A short time afterward, Mr. Donaldson entered the shop and found Michael behind the counter. Donaldson anticipated trouble, and had spent his time *en route* in working up to a proper degree of ferocity.

"Howdydo, Hale?" he gritted.

Michael was not disturbed.

"Hello, Mr. Donaldson!" he answered, with a tone of sarcasm that made his hearer uneasy.

A quick look about the store brought puzzlement. It was impeccable, with a bright and prosperous air that took a deal of wind from one's sails. Donaldson was a petty crook, a business masquerader, and his victims were usually shiftless and unable to conquer conditions. He did most of his bullying in dirty hovels. Cleanliness and seeming prosperity distracted him.

"Well, Hale," he said, almost apologetically, "this is the day, you will remember, when a payment of twenty-five dollars was due. Have you seen to that?"

"You bet!" Hale took up a neat ledger. "Here's the book I've started keeping for us. There's the week's profits, see? Well, instead of dividing them fifty-fifty, I've given her half, plus twenty-five dollars of my share. I've just transferred it to her on the book; and here's the ten dollars I paid on the rent credited to me, see?"

There were surprising figures in the ledger. Donaldson became suddenly affable, but Michael was little moved. He noticed that the business broker licked his lips now and again as he scanned the columns.

"A good showing, Hale!" said Donaldson. "An excellent showing. Now I think I'll just step in and pay my respects to Mrs. Boyd."

"Sure!" said Hale, with a faint sniff.

Donaldson made his way to the sitting room.

"What's your trouble?" he asked curtly.

Mrs. Boyd nodded toward the front of the shop.

"Well, what's the matter with him?"

"Matter?" she whispered viciously. "Can't you see? He's torn up the whole place. He's sold off all my old stock and bought a lot of expensive new stuff. That ain't all. We ain't ever goin' to get rid of him, the way he's acting. He's going to stay!"

Donaldson smiled.

"What do you want him to quit for? Ain't he doing a good business? Why kill a goose that's laying golden eggs?"

Mrs. Boyd was outraged.

"My Lord!" she gasped. "D'you mean you want me to let him go on the way he is? Why, I haven't a word to say any more. I'm a nobody in my own store. He treats me like I was dirt; and that ain't all. He's killin' me, he is. He makes me get up at half past six in the morning and stay up till half past nine or ten o'clock at night. D'you expect me to stand for that?"

Donaldson extended his hand and tapped her shoulder.

"Hush! Not so loud! Money is money, ain't it? We don't care how we make it, or who makes it for us."

"But — but — why, listen, I ain't handlin' any of the money. He went and opened a bank account, and he takes everything out of the register and puts it in the bank. The other day I took some I needed, and he would have called an officer if I hadn't give it back."

"Well," argued Donaldson, "what harm in that? He's keeping a book, and I could tell from looking at it that he's keeping it honest. If you think he's knocking down, why, all you got to do is check the cash register against the stuff that's missing from the stock."

"I know, I know," interrupted Mrs. Boyd, her lips quivering. "I know he's honest that way—otherwise, how would we have stung him for that last fifty? But this is liable to go on for years and years!"

Donaldson looked at her thoughtfully.

"Then you really want to get rid of him, when he's liable to make a killing for you?"

"Of course I do. D'you think I want a sap like that bossin' me and not lettin' me call my soul my own? Ain't I human?"

Donaldson licked his lips again.

"Well," he said, "don't you worry. There's a way. Just leave it to me and wait a little while."

"Wait? I can't stand it another minute longer!"

"Yes, you can. Don't act like a fool. There's real money in the wind here. Do you want to throw it away?"

"What do you mean?"

"I ain't telling. You leave this to me and wait. Understand me? Wait, and keep waiting till I tell you to do different. That ought to be easy enough. He seems to be doing all the work, anyhow."

Whereupon Donaldson went away, and Mrs. Boyd, bewildered and hysterical, settled to a course in waiting. She decided that she would not lift a finger to help her odious partner. She kept to her sitting room, devouring novels and nursing hatred. This gave her a certain moral ascendancy for a time, but it soon became apparent that Michael was more pleased by it than otherwise.

Gnawed by her failure, she turned to Donaldson again, but to no avail. He only gave her rude instructions to "keep her shirt on." He would say nothing more.

Time passed. Michael transferred to her the balance of seventy-five dollars that was due from him, and became a more permanent fixture than ever. She proclaimed that she would stop speaking to him. She told him so frequently. He was putting on airs, she said—all the airs of a real business man, when he was just a low tyrant.

One day, as she dawdled over her book, half clad and disheveled, he entered her sitting room, with his scrub bucket.

"Came in to clean up," he announced curtly.

She got to her feet, struggling to voice her fury.

"You get out of here!" she rasped. "I take care of this room."

"No, you don't, and I ain't going to stand for it any longer. You can smell it clear to the front door. You'll have to take that dog and put him in a box in the back yard. He's an awful thing to have in a shop where people come for food. He looks like some kind of a disease!"

"What do you mean by saying things like that, you dirty little rat?" said Mrs. Boyd, but her voice trembled.

"Don't call me dirty," answered Michael. "I'm not dirty—but you are!"

Mrs. Boyd stared at him. Of a sudden, tears filled her eyes. She tried to turn away with a show of spirit, but her body drooped in spite of her.

"Take the dog out with you," ordered Michael.

She stooped listlessly, and caught up the small animal. Michael glimpsed her face, white and streaked, her lips hanging loose, because her little store of energy was gone. He hurried to the door and stopped her by dropping his hand lightly on her shoulder.

"Say!" he said. "Don't take that what I said hard. I wouldn't have said it if you hadn't abused me. Shucks! Say, listen—what's the reason you've fought me so hard? We could be good partners, if you'd only do your share!"

VI

Mrs. Boyd crouched in the kitchen for a time, and then returned, dogless and alone, to a sitting room that smelled of water and soap suds. She dropped into her chair and sat rocking feebly, staring at the wall with a tragic air.

Michael came to the door.

"Now, Mrs. Boyd," he said, "there's that bedroom, too. I can't get to it to-day, but—"

"Oh, I'll do it," she groaned. "I'll do it myself!"

She began work moaning, but as she made progress she felt better. She took a great deal of helpless rage out on the scrubbing brush and the floor. Now and then she stopped to twist her head over her shoulder and breathe threats.

"You wait till Donaldson and me gets through with you, you damned little dude!"

A dozen times, during the days that followed, she swore she would never give way and do such low work again; but when a week had passed, she found herself listening with dread every time he came near her quarters. Finally, in terror, she set to and cleaned them thoroughly.

As she was wiping up the floor of the bedroom, Michael came to the door and nodded with an appreciative air.

"Nice work!" he commented.

"Damned little dude!" she said under her breath.

"Say!" he went on. "Look here!" He rattled something. "Seventy-five dollars!"

She turned her head quickly and saw him holding out several bills.

"That's your share for this week alone. Think o' that, now! We did a hundred and fifty profit. It ain't two hundred, like I said, but it's getting mighty near it."

Mrs. Boyd sat back on her haunches, open-mouthed.

"Go on—take it," he chuckled. "You got lots more in your account in the bank. You could afford to go out and blow some of it in."

She clutched at the money, and put it in her bosom. He drew a newspaper from his pocket.

"'At's what I'm going to do with mine," he added. "Blow it in! Look here—'Special blue serge suits for thirty-seven fifty.' I'm going to grab me a new suit and hat. For once in my life, I'm going to have classy clothes. Say, I'll leave this paper here. It's got a lot of bargains for women, too. Grab a few. You can afford it. The money's walking right in the door every day now."

Thereafter he never failed to give her at least a part of her share of the profits in cash. Her tendency was to hoard the money, but he kept leaving newspapers within her reach, and she couldn't resist them forever. She began going down town and gingerly making purchases.

Then the possession of new things went to her head. She had a buying spree.

One evening she found herself arrayed in a spick and span gingham dress, with white silk stockings and new canvas shoes. An hour or so of self-admiration caused her to make a real attempt to fix her hair; and then it became impossible to remain alone. What was the use of being all dressed up if nobody could see your clothes?

She entered the forward part of the shop.

"Class!" cried Michael. "Now you look like a lady should look. I'm proud to have you come in the store with me!"

Mrs. Boyd flushed darkly.

"Is that so?" she snapped.

Michael grinned, but said nothing more. He was much changed himself by that time. He had acquired the blue serge suit, and a velour hat, as well. He wore the velour hat constantly, and kept three cigars peeping from his vest pocket. That was Michael's idea of the ultimate in prosperity—to have a velour hat and three cigars in his vest pocket.

Things went along smoothly for a short time. Mrs. Boyd took to helping at the counter, and this gave Michael a bit more leisure. He got the materials for his special salad, and began offering samples to every customer. He strolled around town and picked up bargains in equipment. Before long the store was made impressive by a glittering meat cutter and a scale with a sanitary balance tray.

The profits increased a little. Mrs. Boyd purchased a manicure set and a box of face powder.

One day Michael went to the bank, leaving her in charge. He had not been gone a full minute before Donaldson swung in briskly. Mrs. Boyd was disturbed.

"My, what a change!" cried the business broker, looking her over with narrowed eyes.

"Um, hum!" grunted Mrs. Boyd, fidgeting with a loop of wrapping twine.

Donaldson leaned on the counter in a confiding way.

"Well," he said, "the time has come. In a few days you'll be free again. Now you'll see why we've waited. This business is worth a lot more than it used to be. We can sting the next boob for an even thousand dollars!"

"Oh!" she answered.

"I guess you're ready to lose Hale," urged Donaldson. "He's ridden over you like a man on a horse, and I guess you want to get even. I'll bet you do!"

That woke bitter memories.

"Yes, he did ride over me," she seconded. "He's said things to me I'll never forget—dirty things. I ain't saying he hasn't made good. There's a lot in his favor, but ever since he came here I've had a sort of feeling against him. I don't like him. Yes, I'm ready for him to go!"

Donaldson chuckled and closed one eye.

"Well," he promised, "your time comes now. Within a week, I promise you, you'll have this nice little shop all to yourself. You be here to-night. I'll come in and give him a surprise. Just wait till to-night and see what happens!"

VII

Mrs. Boyd spent the day wondering what was to happen. She wandered restlessly over the premises, thinking about it. Once she started to the front of the shop, saying:

"I'll go ask Mike about it."

She caught herself up with a gasp of surprise. Had she stopped hating Michael? Of course not!

"What if he has made money?" she reflected. "What should I care about that? He doesn't show me any respect at all. No matter how nice I'm dressed, why, he hardly even looks at me!"

Then she dwelt upon the artful suggestion left by Donaldson.

"All to myself!" she murmured. "Near a hundred and seventy-five a week! All right! Let him go, the damned little dude!"

In the evening she took post behind the counter with Michael. She was careful to be cold and aloof in manner.

As the stream of customers dwindled, she became nervous. Mike put the ledger on the counter, and began to make entries in it. She watched his steady shoulders and deliberate hands with impatience.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't quit workin' sometimes!" she snapped.

Michael grunted.

"Plenty to do!" he said.

She glanced at the clock. It was a quarter to nine.

"Say, why not beat it?" The words leaped from her tongue without bidding. "Why not beat it quick, while the shows are open? You ain't had a night off since you been here."

Michael faced her in surprise; but before he could answer, there came a brisk step, and Donaldson turned into the shop. Mrs. Boyd faltered a little. She made an effort to speak, but had no chance to do so.

Donaldson cleared his throat with a fierce air.

"Well, Hale, I have something to say to you."

Michael put down his pen.

"Yeah?"

"I'm going to tell you at once that I've come on an unpleasant errand. I've something to say that you won't want to hear, but there's no use beating about the bush. We have to be cold-blooded in business. So—what I'm here to tell you is that Mrs. Boyd is not satisfied with you as a partner."

Michael did not look her way. So far as she could observe, he merely stared at the plate glass window in front of the shop.

"Under the terms of the agreement," went on Donaldson, "Mrs. Boyd has the privilege of terminating the partnership at any time by refunding you the two hundred dollars you paid for your interest. Mrs. Boyd wants me to notify you that she intends to take advantage of this provision. Within ten days, therefore, you are to make arrangements to leave here. We will pay you the two hundred dollars as soon as you are ready."

Michael flipped the ledger shut and curled his lip.

"I know all about that agreement," he announced, placing the book on a shelf. "One of our customers here is a lawyer, and I showed it to him. He says there's no question about her having the right to buy me out, but he says the price is ridiculous. He says that if you try to make me sell for two hundred, I'm to come to him, and we'll all go to court and bring in witnesses who'll tell how I built this business up, and will show what the real value of my share is."

The little man began to wipe the counter with a moist rag.

"Incidentally," he went on, "when the lawyer heard about how you kept talking to me when I signed the agreement, he said it wasn't worth a darn as a contract, anyhow. So, unless you want to go into court with me, don't come here talking about two hundred dollars. It 'll cost you two thousand to buy me out!"

Donaldson's face turned red.

"Now see here, Hale!" he began. "Now—"

Michael stopped work and eyed him coldly.

"Shut up!"

"But—"

"Shut up!" Michael was putting the rag out of sight below the counter. "I understand you and you understand me. Don't try to throw any more bluff, because I'm tired of listening to you!"

Donaldson was gasping for breath, but he made one more attempt to talk.

"Hale—"

"Shut up, I said!"

The little man walked over and took his coat from a hook on the partition. He put it on slowly.

"I'll give up the partnership any time you're ready to pay the price," he said in a level tone.

He started toward the street door. As he passed Mrs. Boyd, he glanced at her momentarily and turned his head away. His eyes were hot and scornful, as when he rebuked her for slovenliness. The same disgust was in them—the expression that had withered her soul because it rated her little better than an animal.

She uttered a cry and sprang toward him, grasping his arm.

"Wait!" she said. "Wait, Mike!" She took air with a great gulp, her chest heaving. "He's lying! I don't want you to go, Mike! He—he went and talked me into it, and I didn't know what to do. He's a crook—that's all he is!" She paused, then voiced an inspiration. "He got me in his clutches. For years I've been in the clutches of that man. I couldn't get rid of him; but you're right. He can't do this, and I won't let him!"

Michael made a grimace of incredulity and contempt.

"Don't!" she pleaded. "Don't look like that! Please don't! We can go on and be partners, Mike. We can be good partners. We can—"

A sob choked her. Michael began to disengage her fingers. Making inarticulate sounds, she replaced them as rapidly as possible.

Donaldson laughed harshly.

"What a sucker you are, Mrs. Boyd! Are you going to let him walk off with your—"

Then Donaldson stopped, for Michael had suddenly broken free of her, and had removed his coat. He was coming around the end of the counter with a purposeful air.

Donaldson went out of the Homelike Delicatessen.

THE PRISONER

There is a chamber in my house of life,
A secret room that holds a prisoner—
A prisoner so bound about with chains
That he can scarcely stir.

There is a jailer stands without the door,
To keep him guarded in that secret room
And gagged, so that he cannot cry aloud,
Alone there in the gloom.

But should he some day throw off his restraint,
And burst his way through the well guarded door
Of that small, secret room, life would be changed—
Yes, changed forevermore.

I am the jailer who stands at the door,
To guard him so he may not shout nor stir;
The secret prison room is my own heart—
I fear the prisoner!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

Never Go Back to Say Good-By

HOW A POPULAR COLLEGE MAN PUT HIS HEAD INTO THE LION'S MOUTH

By George F. Worts

BENNY DAIBER strode into the library with his hands in his trousers pockets and his gray felt crushed under one elbow.

" Well, I took your advice," he said.

His brother looked up inquiringly from the book he was reading.

" That must have given you a novel sensation," he drawled.

Benny wore a fuzzy tan wool vest under his coat. He swayed slowly forward and back, with his hands spreading out the legs of his trousers. He was a smiling, handsome young man of twenty, with crinkly red hair, which he wore brushed back as sleekly as its crinkliness would permit from a shapely freckled forehead. Benny was a sophomore in the State University, and he was seriously in love. In other words, he was not a torchbearer in the triumphal march of education.

As Jason Daiber stared at the vest, a smile contracted the muscles of his face until his dark eyes were squeezed half shut.

" How did you get it back?"

Benny stopped swaying and looked down at the gold and black jewel pinned on the vest just below his heart. It was incrusted with pearls, and it signified his fealty to an almost holy order. He sighed.

" Virginia and I had a long talk, Jase. It's all off!"

" I hope you two love birds didn't quarrel," the elder said pleasantly.

" She was sore as a pup at first," Benny informed him. " Women are damned hard to explain things to. They always seem to be looking for hidden meanings, don't they?"

" Always," Jason agreed.

" But I convinced her that things just couldn't go on this way. My gosh, a man can't do justice to himself in college if he's got a skirt on the bean all the time!"

" Somehow that has a familiar ring," Jason put in dryly.

" I've been doing a lot of thinking, Jase. If I don't buck up in my work, they'll con me out by June. It isn't fair to keep on making you the goat. And, damn it, I'm missing out all around. I ought to be going out for the team, and I ought to be knocking around with the gang more. I haven't been getting a thing out of college since Virge and I began getting thick. You needn't grin, you big stiff! It was a job putting it across. Gosh, but the woman was peeved!"

" I suppose you employed your usual tact, and handed her all these worthy sentiments without any warning?"

Benny grinned.

" I guess you don't know what a good little fixer I am. Before I left, she saw everything my way. She's an old peach, Jase!"

" Well, I'm glad it's all over, and you can knuckle down to your work. Where are you headed now?"

" Oh, I'm just going to trickle over and say good-by."

Jason sprang up and laid his hands heavily on Benny's shoulders.

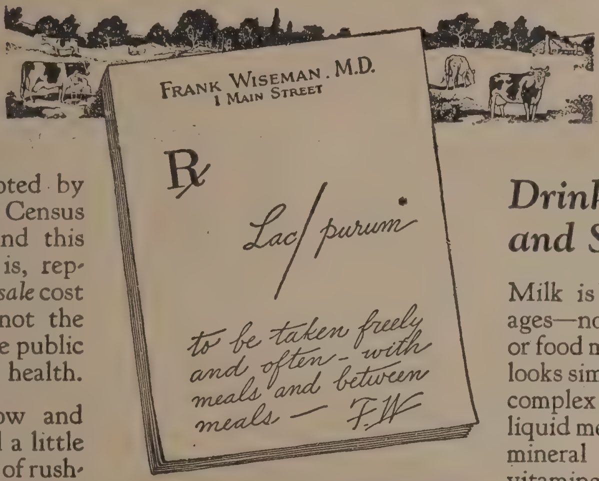
" Don't do that, Ben!" he said earnestly. " Never, under any circumstances, go back to say good-by!"

Benny backed indignantly away from the restraining hands.

Medicine *vs.* Milk

MORE than $219,000,000 a year for patent medicines in the United States! This is the astounding figure quoted by the latest Government Census of Manufactures. And this figure, startling as it is, represents only the *wholesale* cost of these medicines—not the retail price paid by the public in its frantic search for health.

There are times, now and then, when we all feel a little below par. If, instead of rushing off for a bottle of Dr. Bunkum's Tonique to brace us up, we would go to Nature herself for the greatest of all food-tonics—milk—we would be a different lot of men and women.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℞
Lac purum*
to be taken freely and often—with meals and between meals — F.W

*Pure Milk

Here is a prescription that is worth $219,000,000 many times over. It has built more strong bodies than all the medicines invented or compounded by man from the beginning of time.

Milk is Nature's Patent

—the only food she ever made solely for food. It cannot be reproduced artificially. Only Nature herself can so perfectly blend all the elements of a well-balanced diet as she has in milk.

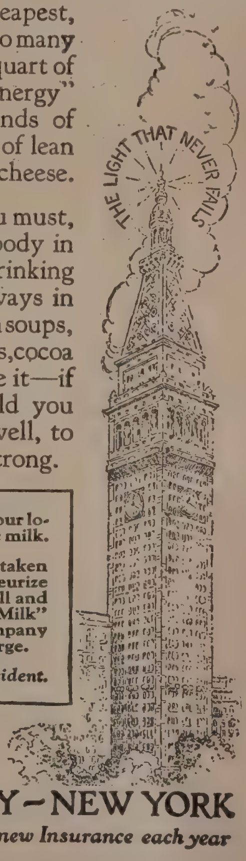
Milk sounds like patent medicine when all its virtues are catalogued. It is the oldest prescription in the world—Nature's prescription for the building of strong, healthy bodies, Nature's revitalizer, Nature's maker of rich, red blood, Nature's nerve quieter, Nature's antidote for that "tired feeling". If milk were announced for what it really is, "The greatest body-builder and health restorative in the world", people would flock to buy it.

Drink More Milk and Save Money

Milk is an ideal food for all ages—not just a pleasant drink or food merely for children. It looks simple, but it is the most complex food in the world—liquid meat, sugar and fat with mineral salts and life-giving vitamines added.

Nutrition experts declare milk to be the most nearly perfect food we have as well as one of the cheapest, for it can take the place of so many more expensive foods. A quart of milk contains the same "energy" value as 8 eggs, or 2 pounds of potatoes, or ¾ of a pound of lean beef or ⅓ of a pound of cheese.

Save on other things if you must, but not on milk. If anybody in your family objects to drinking raw milk there are many ways in which it can be served—in soups, custards, ice cream, desserts, cocoa—lots of good things. Use it—if you are run down, to build you up. Use it—if you are well, to keep you healthy and strong.


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

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HALEY FISKE, *President.*

Published by

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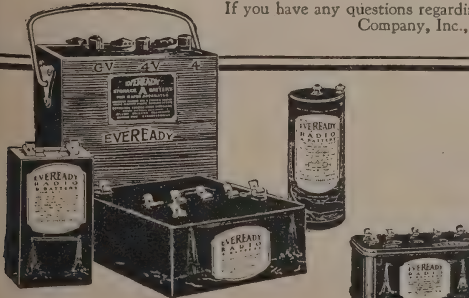

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The Simple Art of *Getting* Well and *Keeping* Well

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation —or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work —invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health is yours once more.*

"I am office manager for a large mercantile corporation. Two years ago I began to develop 'nerves,' stomach trouble, insomnia, and worst of all to me, an irritable disposition towards those under me. Chatting with a friend I spoke of always feeling so rotten that life was hardly worth living. My friend urged me to try Fleischmann's Yeast, attributing his own excellent health to its daily use. At the end of a week I was eating it with a relish, and feeling a great deal improved. Now a day never passes that I don't eat at least three cakes—using them as a between-meal snack—with the result that I am in the best of health with an eager zest for my work."

(Extract from letter of Mr. G. A. Dempsey of Winnipeg, Canada)

"I watched her crumble the crisp cake into the milk. We drifted into conversation. She sang of the magic of Fleischmann's Yeast. Many months before, her doctor had recommended it and she confessed she owed the clearness of her complexion to its use.

"I was persuaded to try the yeast in milk, and prepared to swallow an obnoxious dose. I was pleasantly surprised. It proved a delightfully palatable drink.

"Fleischmann's Yeast waged a successful battle against the canker sores, dried up the existing ones and cured the stomach condition which was causing them. I faced my winter's work with enthusiasm, and came through triumphant."

(Extract from a letter of Miss Grace S. Baumann of Philadelphia)

"I knew my headaches and unwholesome complexion were caused by constipation. To take frequent cathartics was my regular program and even by doing this I was tired and dopey. 'I like what yeast does for me' said one of my customers and asked if I had ever tried it. I acted on this suggestion and began to drink yeast in milk regularly. Soon people began to comment on how well I was looking—my husband said I grew younger—the mirror told me my complexion and eyes were clear and bright. Cathartics are now a thing of the past."

(A letter from Mrs. Mabelle Conomikes of Marathon, N. Y.

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain. Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tin foil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! A few days' supply will keep fresh in *your* ice box as well as in the grocer's. Write for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-3, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York City.

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Not Genuine without our facsimile signature
The Fleischmann Co.
YEAST

"I tell you it's all fixed up. After this, we're just going to be good friends."

"Listen, Ben! Listen to a man who has seen this thing happen before. You have withdrawn your head from the lion's mouth. What you're threatening to do now is not only to stick it back in again, but to throw red pepper in the lion's nose. I'm not exaggerating the seriousness of this, Benny. Never—never go back to say good-by to a girl after everything is fixed up."

"You treat me as if I was made of sugar," Benny panted. "I tell you I'm through with her. I'm only going down there now to say good-by—the only decent thing a fellow can do. Don't be such a twirp. I'll be back in twenty minutes. Watch the clock! Time me! I'm going to take the bus."

And Benny stalked indignantly out of the library.

It was a cold, moonlit fall night. Crisp maple leaves crackled under the young man's feet as he walked behind the house to the garage. A gloomy sort of romance was abroad.

Benny drove recklessly across town, and the air on his hot cheeks was deliciously chill. He seldom became angry at his ironic, advice giving brother, but to-night Jason had gone too far—the twirp! Treating him like a sixteen-year-old kid! Never go back to say good-by! Bunk!

II

Virginia Oswald abode with her parents in a trim new Dutch Colonial house in Broxter Place. There was no front porch and no doorbell button; only a semicircular brick stoop and a brass door knocker of chaste design, fondly believed by Mrs. Oswald to be more than a hundred years old.

Lights glowed pinkly at all the downstairs windows.

Benny left his brother's roadster at the curb, proceeded briskly up the walk of irregular flagstones with grass rising rurally from the cracks, lifted the knocker, and let it fall.

Presently the door opened. A breath of warm air drifted to his face. Hospitable amber light from the living room formed a halo about Virginia's fluffy light hair. In a pale green dress she looked slender and rather romantic as she stood there staring for a moment into the moonlit night before she recognized him. He could not see her face.

"Oh, it's you," Virginia said coldly. "What do you want?"

"Why—why, I want to see you!" Benny gasped.

"You said you'd seen enough of me."

"Oh, my gosh!" Benny groaned. "I thought you understood. I thought everything was all right."

"So it is."

"But you're sore!"

"Not in the least."

"Well, let me in, then."

"I don't want you to come in. I don't want to talk to you. There is nothing you can possibly say that will interest me in the slightest."

The door began to close. Benny's alarm changed to horror.

"Look here, Virge, I can't go away with things this way! Gosh, anybody would think—"

"Anybody would think," Virginia finished decisively, "that we had seen quite enough of each other. Good night!"

Benny inserted his foot as the door closed.

"Well," he said, desperately casual, "I guess I'll drop in and say hello to your dad. Something I want to ask him."

"My father is not at home."

"Then I'd like to run up and say hello to Lily."

He always called Virginia's mother that. A woman who looked so young, he had once explained to her, simply couldn't be addressed as Mrs. Oswald. Lily liked Benny immensely.

"She isn't here." Virginia's voice came muffled from behind the door. "I am all alone. I am not going to let you in. Kindly remove your foot."

"Say, Virge, you look here—" he began angrily.

She opened the door a few inches and pushed it forcibly against his foot. That was painful. Benny withdrew the foot, and heard the lock snap into place.

He looked at the brass knocker incredulously. He lifted it and brought it smartly down. There was no response. He let it drop again.

"Well!" said Benny thoughtfully. "Well!"

When further adventures with the antique knocker achieved no results other than faint external echoes, he kicked the door.

"Let me in!" he called.

The saxophonic laughter of a fox-trot record pealed forth from within.

Benny showered the door with kicks. He turned away irresolutely, turned back, lifted his fists, and drummed on the solid wooden barrier. He evoked no response.

Presently Virginia changed the record. Benny stalked haughtily toward his brother's roadster, opened the door, turned around, and walked back to the house. He looked in through one of the windows. Virginia had turned off the phonograph, and was reclining in a deep chair before the radio receiver.

A series of yelps and howls reached Benny. He tapped on the window. Virginia did not turn her head.

He walked around to the side of the house and disconnected the lead-in wire from the aerial. He returned smugly to the window. The yelping and howling had ceased. Virginia was determinedly adjusting knobs and dials.

Benny banged on the window, but she would not look. He returned to the door, and assaulted it once more with his oxfords. He went back to the window, and banged on it until Virginia jumped up and sailed out of the room. In a moment an upstairs window flew up. Virginia's fluffy head appeared.

" Virginia!" he began hotly.

" You will hereafter address me as Miss Oswald, Mr. Daiber," she said in a chilly tone. " And you'd better stop banging around this house, or I'll call some one!"

The moonlight made her face look cold, hard, and beautiful — like marble. Here was a Virginia he did not know.

" You'd better let me in," he said wrathfully, " or I'll bang this damned house to pieces! I'm coming in to say good-by to you. I'm—"

" I don't want you to say good-by to me," Virginia interrupted. " I'm going to get my father's revolver, and if you break into this house I'll shoot you as if you were any other housebreaker! Go on home, and let me alone! I should think you'd have some decency, Ben Daiber, trying to frighten a girl all alone in a house, like this!"

" I won't go home until you let me say good-by to you. This is a dirty trick, Virginia Oswald, shutting me out of your house this way, after—after—"

Fury choked him.

Virginia's head withdrew, and the window closed.

Benny looked up at the cold pane, and started grimly for the back of the house. He tried the kitchen door. He tried the side door. Then he systematically tried all the windows on the ground floor, not neglecting the cellar ones. He was barred from the Oswald residence by every device known to modern householders.

When Benny returned to the front of the house after his fruitless exploration, his face was white and sinister. The lights went out downstairs as he glared at them, and a feeble glow went on upstairs in the back.

He hastened to the back of the house, puffing with rage. Here there was a small porch designed to shelter servants, ash cans, and garbage pails. Above the porch was a lighted window. He knew that this aperture furnished southern light during the day for a little spare room, which Lily and Virginia were wont to use for personal dressmaking enterprises.

Jamming his hat more tightly over his ears, Benny climbed one of the posts, dragged himself upon the roof of the porch, and crawled on hands and knees to the lighted window.

Virginia was sitting on the couch, with her chin cupped in one hand. Her long lashes swept so close to her cheeks that he could not see her eyes. She was pale, and her mouth was set in a tight line. Her other hand was in her lap, where it comforted a large nickel-plated revolver.

Benny tried to raise the window. It was locked. His fumbling caused Virginia to look up. Terrified, she grasped the revolver and sprang to her feet. Benny sent his right foot through the pane. He inserted one hand, turned the latch, raised the window, and crawled in.

Virginia shrank back, frightened by the look in his eyes. Benny tried to collect himself. The pallor was driven out of his face by an upthrust of crimson.

" After all the years we've played around together!" he cried.

" Breaking windows!" she gasped.

" Locking me out!" Benny snapped.

" Climbing porches!"

" Playing the phonograph when—"

" Kicking our front door to pieces!"

" Slamming it in my face!"

" Making the neighbors wonder what kind of a house this is!"

" I've got just one thing to say to you, Miss Oswald. I'm through with you!"

"You certainly are, Mr. Daiber! Now just climb back out of this room the way you came!"

III

It was on a Monday night that Virginia ordered Benny out of her house. Approximately thirty-six hours later, the office boy laid a telegram on Jason Daiber's desk. It had been sent from Detroit, and was signed by his married sister, Alice.

> They are here—I am holding the fort—come immediately.

That was just like Alice!

Jason caught the first train for Detroit. He reached his sister's apartment late in the afternoon. Alice answered his ring, hastened into the hall, and closed the door.

"Thank God you've come!" she cried.

She was hysterical and white with anxiety. Alice had married, Jason had always thought, too young. Her dramatic moments had been few, and she made the most of them when they appeared. She had been weeping. She was wringing her hands. Her lips were flabby, her eyes pink, and her cheeks stained from crying. Jason wondered how his brother-in-law could stand her.

"Are they married yet?" Jason snapped.

"No, thank God, not yet! You're still in time, Jason. How I've worried! The day I've spent! They're in the living room, Jason. I—I think they're wavering. Oh, I don't know! It's driven me distracted! Talk to them, Jason! Be firm! Think of that child ruining his life, giving up his college career, after mamma practically died begging him, and you sacrificing yourself—"

Jason pushed open the door and entered the living room. Benny and Virginia were sitting close together on Alice's overstuffed sofa. They didn't seem to him to be wavering. They seemed to be very wantonly holding hands, to be snuggling together, as if for mutual comfort and protection. After a day spent with Alice, he did not blame them.

Benny jumped up when his brother came in. He looked tired. He was gaunt and hollow-eyed, and his red hair was not quite so crinkly. He effusively shook Jason's unresponsive hand, and grinned all the while. He was jumpy with nervousness and obviously relieved to see his brother.

Jason looked coldly at Virginia, and in return for that unfriendly inspection she gave him a shy, appealing glance. Then she dropped her eyes again. She, too, was nervous, hollow-eyed, and wan.

Jason sat down and placed the tips of his fingers together.

"Where's my roadster?"

"It's down at a public garage," Benny explained eagerly. "The—the headlights are—are bashed in."

"Anything else bashed in?"

"No! Oh, no! She's in fine shape. Isn't she, Virginia?"

Virginia nodded.

"Now give an account of yourself," Jason requested. "Try to be chronological. At about eight o'clock on Monday evening you left home to say good-by to Virginia. You were coming back in twenty minutes, if you'll remember."

Benny sat down beside Virginia and leaned forward with a wide grin.

"We—we—we just ran away, Jase. We couldn't stand being apart any longer!"

"Where did you get the money?"

"We — Virginia cashed a check at Bailey's drug store."

Jason looked at Virginia.

"Was it good?"

She nodded mutely.

"I guess we were kind of out of our heads," Benny explained. "We wanted to go some place a long way off. I don't know how to explain it. You probably couldn't understand. We didn't know where we were going, at first. I guess we were kind of delirious. We drove down the State road toward Buffalo. When we got cooled off a little, we decided to go on and catch the day boat for Detroit. We thought we'd better go and see Alice."

"Thank God you did!" interjected Alice fervently.

"Just the other side of Batavia, we were hitting it up about forty, and—and a turkey ran out into the road. We hit him, and—and the headlights were bashed in. We couldn't see the road then, and—well, we missed the morning boat for Detroit, so we took the night boat."

"And I've decided," Virginia put in tremulously, "that we won't be married until Benny finishes school."

"Let me get this straight," Jason interrupted. "You drove all Monday night and got into Buffalo Tuesday morning, too late to catch the day boat. What did you do until the night boat sailed?"

"We went to Niagara Falls."

"Proceed!"

"So we took the night boat for Detroit."

"The night boat for Detroit!" Jason murmured.

Benny glared at his brother.

"Look here, Jase, if you're insinuating that—"

"I'm not insinuating anything. Tell me what happened on the night boat."

"Happened!" Benny shouted. "What do you suppose happened? Darn you, anyway, Jase, always twisting— I didn't have any overcoat, and it was as cold as the dickens on Lake Erie. We walked up and down the deck—"

"All night long?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, if you'll let me! We walked to keep warm. The saloon was stuffy, and it smelled of stale food and steam. I want you to understand that I think more of Virginia's little finger—"

"Virginia should be very grateful," Jason said dryly. "Now let's put the pieces together, and see what sort of picture puzzle we have. You drove all Monday night to Buffalo. You missed the Tuesday day boat for Detroit, so you spent the day at Niagara Falls. That night you and Virginia spent walking the deck to keep warm. That lands you in Detroit, doesn't it?"

"We came here the minute the boat docked and we could get the car off," Benny put in sullenly. "We've been up here with sis ever since."

"And how thankful we can be for that!" Alice breathed.

Jason gazed at her thoughtfully.

"Do you believe Benny's story, Alice?"

"Indeed I do!" she cried.

Virginia leaped up from the sofa with her fists clenched at her sides.

"I think you're just terrible, Jason Daiber! You needn't ask any more of your insulting questions! I'm not going to marry your brother!"

Benny had risen and placed his arm protectively about her waist.

"Don't mind him," he said huskily. "You love me, don't you, Virginia?"

"Of course I love you!" Virginia snapped.

"Now look here, Jason!" said Benny defiantly. "We let Alice persuade us not to get married until you talked it over with us. You've got to do some mighty convincing talking, Jase!"

Jason, with his black eyes dreamily on Virginia's white, tense little face, nodded.

"I believe your story, too, Benny. It's a beautiful story, and I'll help you lick any man who insinuates it isn't true; but we are living in such a sordid world, Benny! So, to-morrow, as soon as we have hunted up a minister—"

"Minister!" Alice shrieked. "You're not going to let these babies get married, Jason?"

"Let them?" Jason snorted. "I'm going to supervise it personally, and I'm sure that Virginia's parents will agree with me. As I was saying, to-morrow, as soon as we have tripped down to the minister, we'll all go hunting for a cute little apartment, and another popular college man will enter the automobile industry. You're hoeing your own row now, Benny. College days are past. As I told you the other night, it is dangerous to go back and say good-by!"

THE MOTOR SHIP

Who comprehends the throb of the strong heart
  As this ship comprehends it? Ecstasy
  Profound and lonely given to the sea—
A pressure and retreat, a beat and start,
A thrust and close of full possessive hold.
  Proud lover of the sea, both sun and moon
  Are pebbles in her path; the wild typhoon
But stirs the power to meet power. Old
The wind and young the ship! It shall not wrench
  Her from her own. Resistance beautiful,
Resistance steady, firm, and deep, shall quench
  The loud excited hurricane and pull
The winds to silence, listening chagrined
To this rich throb of pulses disciplined!

Kathryn White Ryan

The Bullfighter

A ROMANCE OF THE THRILLING SPORT OF THE ARENA

By T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright," "East Is East," etc.

XXV

WHEN at last the great Spanish *corrida* drew upon Caracas, it subdued all other interests in the public eye. For weeks in advance it had been bruited in the pages of *Sol y Sombra*. Now leading articles appeared in the graver dailies—the *Diario*, the *Tiempo*, the *Expreso*—in which were discussed the art of Juan Leon, the æsthetics of tauromachy, and the relation between Spanish civilization and the bullfight.

The *Tiempo* printed an interview with Juan Leon, in which he discussed the movement in Spain to suppress the bullfight.

" This movement," said the famous *diestro*, " marks the beginning of decadence in the Spanish spirit. A bullfight is the most beautiful spectacle that can be imagined—emotion, art, courage, light. The Greek people, the most artistic people of all history, beheld their hero of tragedy die, and were all the more fond of him because he converted grief into artistic material. Formerly we Spanish, too, were like that. A *torero* would die in the ring, and the fight would go on, for we were a strong nation, and, above all, artistic. Now the decadents are seeking to subvert tragedy into sentimentalism, and to drown the courage of a nation in their tears."

Sol y Sombra flamed out in color, with photographs of Juan Leon and Angelito draped with the Venezuelan and Spanish flags. The caption read:

> Separated by the swords of Bolivar and Montillo; united by the art of Angelito and Juan Leon.

Posters of the coming *corrida* lined every *calle* from Candelaria to Calvario. Brass bands were likely to break into full blare around any corner, adorned with streamers of the coming fight. At the *biblioteca*, all the back numbers of the Madrid and Barcelona papers were ransacked by students who could speak with authority upon Juan Leon's style.

Bullfighting is the most stylistic of sports. Its fashions vary from season to season. Now it is the suave and courtly style that receives public applause. Then it is a languid and indolent address—a pure affectation, naturally, as if an *espada* would be negligent with a bull charging him! Then there is the acrobatic style, of which Angelito was a master. All this information was rehearsed in preparation for the proper intellectual enjoyment of the coming fight.

Indeed, the tour of a great Spanish *espada* with a herd of fighting bulls through South America is unlike any North American spectacle. It has all the glare and glitter of a circus, all the éclat and wide advertising of a championship pugilistic contest. It is more dangerous than football. It has the stir and color of a horse race, the grace and music of grand opera, and the ineluctable fatality of tragedy.

In a sense, too, it is more sincere and solidly founded than any or all of these. It is the fact that the fatal event in tauromachy is real, and not feigned, that gives it its tremendous hold on human emotions.

It is art, because it does what all art strives to do—it gives a swift and comprehensive epitome of life within a period of time brief enough for the whole drama to be felt without loss of strength or blurring of impression. Indeed, the bullfight is the most perfect presentation of life yet devised by art.

It is a presentation of life itself, and not a mimic show. It encompasses the strong

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permutations of fortune, and at the end a real death broods over the arena, either for the *torero* or for the beast. It is sensuous, terrifying, dazzling, and fatal. In the midst of intense color and movement, it forecasts the end. It is pregnant with the austere and beautiful truth that the inevitable and fitting end of life is death, that the feverish round of our days is held in the bosom of eternity.

An increasing anxiety had hung over Socorro Jiminez during the approach of the great *corrida,* but now, since it was here, this feeling gave way to the kind of exultation which a great fête always brings. It was as if the fanfare that greeted the *representación* had such a glowing ornamental superstructure that it made the girl forget the tragic reality which lay at its heart.

On the morning of the *corrida,* the boulevard in front of the Jiminez villa was already bright and vocal with packed street cars, with cabs, and with groups of pedestrians flowing cityward to the Nuevo Circo. A traffic policeman was stationed under the banyan in front of the villa, giving drivers and motorists instructions as to what streets were clear to the destinations they sought.

Through an open window Socorro watched the endless and colorful crowd flow past the iron fence. The vertical bars gave each passing group the design and composition of an oil painting. She might have been looking at some very vivid mural decoration.

The pageantry of the scene brought vividly to her mind the possibility of her future husband becoming a great *diestro* in Spain. The thought aroused in Socorro's heart that vague longing for Spain which sleeps, like a racial nostalgia, in the bosom of every South American. The wife of a great *espada* in Barcelona, or Madrid! What a change from the provincialism of Caracas! Ancient, tawny Spain!

A cab drew up at the gate, and a moment later Margarita Miraflores came running up the walk, shaking her handkerchief at her friend.

" Isn't this a wonderful day? Old Tomas could hardly drive up here. The whole street was coming against us. If any one should fall down in the street, he would be dragged straight into the *circo!*" Margarita hurried in and embraced Socorro rapturously. " What are you going to wear?"

Señora Jiminez entered from the rear, holding an old rose dress in her hands.

" I don't know whether to wear this or my new frock from Paris," she said.

" Oh, that, that, *señora!* We must be brilliant to-day, with a member of our family in the *corrida* itself. You must admit Señor Angel gives us tone!"

" For to-day, at least," added the *señora,* not altogether displeased. " Now, Socorro, do turn around and decide what you are going to wear!"

With a lingering look out of the window, Socorro gave herself up to a consideration of gowns; but what crowds of people were passing the villa! It seemed to her a sort of long drawn out tribute to the skill and bravery of Angelito.

XXVI

By eleven o'clock all the numberless cafés of Caracas were jammed with diners, eating betimes for the *corrida.* Post card venders moved among the tables, offering the usual obscene Latin pictures for sale, mixed with portraits of the popular fighters, Juan Leon, Angelito, Ercolito. Out in the *calles* the peons were scattering sucked orange rinds and gnawed mango stones all over the cobbles.

A liberal sprinkling of Englishmen and Americans towered above the crowd — oil promoters, mostly, some of whom had come from as far as Maracaibo or Callao on the Coroni to see the all-absorbing spectacle of the season. These big fellows were offering prodigious prices for box seats, all of which had been sold days before.

In old Malestar's wine shop, among the tables reserved for the *cognoscenti,* there went on a myriad-voiced discussion. How did Juan Leon's bulls compare with those of the great Taglione, of the preceding season? *Diantre, señor,* more magnificent than ever! These bulls were unreasonably superb!

The attendance would undoubtedly top all previous records. There were sure to be *mujers* and *muchachas* suffocated in the jam.

An old gentleman suggested that it would be well to get across to the Nuevo Circo while it was possible to cross the streets.

" What is the hour, *señor?*"

" Twelve fifteen, and they tell me that cabs and motors already have to stop two blocks away and the passengers walk in."

The old *aficionados* sat and listened with thrills to the continual uproar outside. What a *representación* they were about to witness!

The statement that no cab could approach within two blocks of the Nuevo Circo was not quite true. At that very moment a cab containing Rafael and the three ladies of his house had succeeded in getting into the edge of the great plaza fronting the *circo*. Here Angelito stepped out of a shop and met them, in accordance with a prearranged plan. Then, with Angelito in front, Socorro next, the *señora*, Margarita, and Rafael in order, the five threaded their way across to the great façade glaring red in the light of high noon.

The quintet held to each other's arms and moved along with their faces tipped up, as pedestrians do in a dense throng. They were looking at the great entrance ahead of them, and the inscription over it—"*Sol y Sombra*." Socorro clung to Angelito's arm in the wide noise of the crowd. and read the three words.

"Oh, *carisimo!*" she said. "How I hope that it will bring you *sol* and never any *sombra!*"

The bullfighter turned and smiled in her eyes.

"It has been a mother to me, *mi vida*, this place," and he motioned a free hand toward the pile.

The girl knew what Angelito meant, that all his position and wealth—yes, even their own exquisite passion—was a child of this lurid building. Even in the hot press, the girl felt a thrill of profound gratitude that this great building had given her her lover.

How different Angelito was from what she used to fancy when she saw him in the ring! How much more lovable! The glamour of his fighting was now the least of his endearments for her. He was so thoughtful of her, and he awakened in her raptures she had never imagined.

The grim wall of the *circo* had mysteriously bestowed upon Socorro womanhood, love, and a subjective life as keen and brilliant as the spectacles of the arena itself. It had opened to her two queendoms—her own emotions and the world.

One of those little feminine outbursts broke upon her out of her thoughts, and she pressed the back of the bullfighter's hand to her bosom.

"Can you feel your side at all, *alma de mi?*" she asked anxiously.

"Not at all, *carisima*."

They were at the entrance now. Here Angelito must deliver the ladies to Rafael's care and go around to the bulls' gate, in the rear of the *circo*.

As he pressed Socorro's hand in farewell, the girl's face whitened suddenly, and her bosom rose and fell sharply. She lifted her arms about his neck and kissed him passionately, pressing her lips to his in three distinct impulses, as she did when they were alone. Even the *señora* made no remark at this. Indeed, the other three of the party appeared not to see them. As for the crowd, jammed cheek by jowl with them, its component individuals were utterly blind to everything except what was lifted high above them, like the brazen calf of Israel.

Angelito waited at the entrance for Rafael to return and tell him where the family had found their box, so that he could throw them his cloak. When the poet came, he was smiling.

"We are only two boxes removed from the press box," he laughed. "Narciso has just paid us a box call. He said that he was leaving Caracas next week, and wanted to be friends again. I am glad of the reconciliation, Angelito. Montauban is really a good fellow, and, among all of us, I fully believe that he has suffered the most pain."

With the kisses of Socorro Jiminez on his lips, the bullfighter went around the long circular wall of the arena. He passed the ambulance and the horses standing at the bulls' gate, and never once observed them. A little later he stood in the hot sunshine before the gate, knocking for admission.

The *monosabio* who opened the gate wore a shirt of red silk, instead of the usual cotton. This unaccustomed splendor marked the magnificence of the occasion.

Angelito stepped into a small inclosure walled off from the arena. In this hot open space stood a pair of shining black mules, with red harness. These animals tossed and snorted, being rendered uneasy by the faint stench of dried blood that hung in the air.

To the right, the mouth of a dark tunnel sloped downward to the bull pits, where were stabled six of Juan Leon's shipload of Spanish fighting bulls. Next to this tunnel was the door of a dressing room, and, next to this, a door with a cross carved on it. This was the entrance to the chapel, in which the fighters would presently hear a mass before beginning their hazardous games.

Beside the chapel door, in the shade of the overhang, Father Ignacio, in a cassock and a round priest's hat, stood talking to a man a trifle shorter and more compactly built than Angelito. This man wore a well groomed look of success, which caused Angelito to ticket him automatically as some wealthy amateur whose curiosity had led him to accompany the priest behind the scenes of a bullfight.

Father Ignacio glanced around, saw who had entered, and held out an arm toward Angelito, while he continued to talk to the stranger.

"Come here," invited the priest. "I want to present you, Señor Angelito, to Señor Juan Leon of Barcelona. *Señors,* I cannot express my pleasure at bringing together the foremost artists of Venezuela and Spain!"

Angelito was utterly taken aback to find that this man was the famous Juan Leon. The two *toreros* bowed low.

"Señor Angelito? I have heard of him long before I reached these shores. I am very proud to meet a brother artist whom I have been looking forward to seeing."

Angelito said that he anticipated much pleasure in seeing Señor Leon demonstrate the latest Spanish styles in bullfighting. Pancho said all this in very good Spanish, and he thought that his well worded reply was partly due to Socorro. She had lifted him up to another plane. It was impossible to be thrown with Socorro, to love Socorro, and not become a *caballero* indeed.

With this feeling of having stepped into a new and finer world, Angelito opened the dressing room door, and bowed Juan Leon in before him.

The dressing room was cut up into small compartments, each one tiled in white and furnished with electric lights and a shower bath. Fans kept up a constant droning, and while the atmosphere of the room was extremely damp, the circulating currents of air made it not too uncomfortable.

For the first time in his life Angelito had a feeling of ownership in these appointments. Heretofore he had had an impression that he was a peon interloping in a tiled bath; but this gave way before the fact that he was to marry Socorro Jiminez.

He stepped into his own compartment, where an attendant waited to help him. His green fighting clothes were laid out on one side, and made a pleasant contrast against the white tiled background.

He stripped briskly. As is the way with powerfully developed men, he appeared larger without clothes than with them. He bathed, and his helper began tapping his feet, winding the sticky stuff in and out between the great toe and the next, making a firm, tight plaster around the ball of the foot, and then crisscrossing back to the heel.

As the fellow worked, he talked. The bulls in the pit below were wonderful, he declared. Never had he seen such animals—hair like silk, molded muscles, horns not spreading, like the creole bulls, but sharp and black. He kept praising the beauty of the Spanish bulls as if they had been his sweetheart.

Angelito got to his feet and lifted himself lightly on his toes, trying the set of the tape. It was all right, and the fighter sat down again. The helper picked up the green stockings and slipped them over the somewhat square-molded calves of the *espada's* powerful legs.

Then Angelito drew on his tight-fitting fighting slippers and green velvet knee breeches. About the knees were buckles, and these the helper drew tight with all his strength, under the abiding belief of the *circo* that the more tightly bound a fighter's knees are, the more agile he is.

As Angelito dressed, a droning from the arena filtered into his dressing room. Then the cadence of a band came to the fighter's ears, softened by the walls of his compartment. It sounded like a distant silver voice of exquisite flexibility gliding through the strains of a waltz.

It pricked up Angelito's nerves. For him, the *corrida* had begun.

He hurried on his green silk scarf, adjusting one end to his waist and turning himself slowly and carefully, winding the tough silk around him, fold on fold. He tucked the end in, and then put on a tight green jacket of waist length incrusted with gold embroidery. Then he walked out of his compartment, with a springy feeling in his tightly bound knees and in the unyielding, hooflike tape about his feet.

A moment later Señor Leon joined him. The Spanish *torero* was in black. Angelito had never before seen a black fighting uniform. It struck a note of dignity, almost of austerity.

Out of the other cubicles appeared the *banderilleros* and *monosabios,* the ring attendants, and the mule driver. All were as colorful as a masque. When the *monosabios* thought their elders were not looking, they flipped at one another with their handkerchiefs. Then the whole procession filed out of the dressing room and went into the chapel.

The chapel of the Nuevo Circo was a little larger than the dressing room, and a little warmer, on account of the candles burning on the altar. On the right side glowed the perpetual little oil light in its ruby bowl. Its tiny red flame burned in the gloom, now a little brighter, now a little dimmer.

The *toreros* stood at prayer, because their bound knees would not permit them to kneel. At the altar, Father Ignacio bowed at the appointed intervals to kiss the book which an altar boy presented to him.

Angelito kept his eyes fixed on an effigy of our Lady of Sorrows. It seemed to him, in the wavering light of the altar candles, that the eyes of the Virgin moved ever so slightly, and that her uplifted hands beckoned ever so faintly, in signal that his prayer for safety in the coming *corrida* was answered.

" Most holy Virgin," murmured the brilliantly clad fighter, " guard me once more in the arena! Protect me from the horns of the bulls, and guide straight my rapier! Preserve me, our most blessed lady, save me—"

His murmuring died away into an unworded emotion of supplication to the small white figure high up on the altar to save him from the perils of the fight. He crossed himself, touching his forehead, lips, and chest with his forefinger, middle finger, and ring finger, and kissing his thumb nail.

XXVII

When Angelito came out of the chapel, the sensuous swing of the band broke upon his ears, its pulses accented by the ironic chirring of the castanets.

Inside the small inclosure, the procession of the bullfighters fell quickly into line, each man taking his place through long established custom. The *toreros* swung their brilliant cloaks over their shoulders. Juan Leon used a cloak the color of old gold, which made a striking color scheme against the black of his fighting suit.

The *monosabios* made a red and blue cue to the line of fighters, and at the end came the mules with the red harness. An almost vertical sun beat up out of the ground the stench of blood, where thousands of bulls had been dragged out of the arena. The fighters drew out their perfumed handkerchiefs, and blurred the penetrating odor as best they could. A lad in the rear of the line lifted his snub nose and blurted out:

" *Los pies de mi padre!*"

All the boys and some of the men began laughing.

With a flourish the music in the arena ceased. The fighters straightened their line, sighting ahead of them, and calling sharply for some individual to step in or out. They set back their shoulders, ready to step off.

The band crashed into a military measure. The big double doors in front of them opened. The men swung forward.

An immense cheering broke from the multitude and burst on the incoming procession almost like a continuous physical push. The gala colors in the enormous amphitheater, the glare of the sand, beat down and up into Angelito's eyes.

The noise was composed mainly of the name " Juan Leon!" boomed over and over. Now and then Angelito could distinguish his own name, and occasionally that of Ercolito. He was distinctly second, but he registered in his own mind a vow that when this *corrida* was finished he would be first.

At intervals the music of the band reappeared among the billows of applause, like foam spangling the waves. The fighters began their long march around the great circle. As they went, that part nearest them broke into a frenzy of shrieking, screaming, and whistling, of waving hats, sticks, parasols, and handkerchiefs. It was as if the procession was hot, and made the spectators close to it boil.

A passion to make the most of this unexampled opportunity poured strength through Angelito's body. His heart beat. He moved along swinging his green cloak from side to side. He was self-conscious, from the fact that he meant to be the leading *diestro* of this great day; but even at that his movements did not lose the cat-footed grace of a bullfighter.

Above all, he wanted Socorro to see him. He marched around with his eyes leaping from box to box ahead, trying to find her. She was within two compartments of the press box, but that was hard to locate in the endless repetition of boxes, all in violent agitation.

In the circuit, out of custom, Juan Leon paused in front of the draped stall of the president of the republic. The president was a rather fat old man of military bearing, with decorations across his chest. Juan swung off his yellow cloak and flung it up to the balustrade of the box. The *torero's* sudden change from brilliant yellow to black made the amphitheater gasp.

The president's wife leaned out, caught the cloak, and flung back her handkerchief. The Spaniard bowed low over the filmy bit of lace, and placed it in the brocaded frog of his jacket, making a white spot that relieved his somber costume.

Then the other fighters went about throwing up their cloaks, red, purple, orange. The circling balustrades took on the color of the iris.

Angelito went two boxes beyond the press box, but discovered that Socorro was not there. A trepidation seized the fighter lest he should miss her. Then he saw her leaning over the balustrade and waving at him. He had passed her *palco*, the second on the near side of the press box. He walked back past Señor Montauban, and shot up his cloak to her eager hands.

The preliminary players now spread out over the yellow ring, to receive the bull. The uproar of the amphitheater sank to attention.

From the topmost round of the great bank of seats came the military call of a bugle. It rang out a clear, single voice informed with man's age-long defiance of danger and wounds, and of the inimical powers of nature. It was a dauntless voice. It was the cry of man facing the universe, courageous, self-dependent, and pagan.

When the bugle ceased, the silence became absolute. Angelito stood at the barrier under Socorro's box, looking fixedly at the door of the bull pen. Above it, on the great cinema platform, stood a man with rosettes in his hands. The door beneath him opened, and a bull's head emerged from the black rectangle. The man above lifted his darts and flung them downward with all his might.

A second later the beast leaped into the arena, with the crimson rosettes glowing against his black shoulders. The sheer beauty of the powerful animal sent a thrill of admiration over the *circo*.

Instantly the brightly clad players fell into movement with their capes. The arena became a bewildering maze of color.

Like a black bolt, the bull launched himself at the nearest of his provokers. Other players wove in between the bull and the object of his rush, drawing the beast's charge from one player to another. The great black animal lunged among them in a perpetual curving, tossing rush. The men scattered before him like so many brilliant birds. The fighters ran lightly, waving their red capes, advancing, retreating, leaping aside from the bull with the effortless ease of athletes. It was the most graceful movement of the bullfight, and there came a scattering of applause from the seats.

Angelito stood beside Juan Leon at the barrier. Several times the play brought the bull within a few yards of the indolent *toreros*, but neither of them stirred his position or moved a muscle. They quietly studied the bull as he lunged past.

This passing of the bull close to the undisturbed *toreros* brought increasing gusts of applause from the audience. Juan Leon leaning against the barrier was more admired than the *banderilleros* in full play.

Once or twice Angelito looked around at Socorro, and presently he caught her eyes. Her beautiful face was filled with animation. She seemed to repeat the question of the whole amphitheater:

"What sport in the world is comparable to this? What grace, what light, what gay skirting of peril!"

By concert of the players the bull was drawn to the center of the arena. Then the actors suddenly danced away, and the bull was left pawing sand over its back, ready to lunge instantly at its most conspicuous foe.

This marked the end of what might be called the *scherzo* movement of the sonata of the bullfight.

A man in blue silk, with crimson *banderillas* in his hand, now advanced, holding his red darts toward the animal and waggling them tauntingly. A Venezuelan bull would have required much more provocation than that to be lured into another charge, but the Spanish thoroughbred flung himself instantly, and with amazing velocity, at the *banderillero*.

The man held his two red darts straight up toward the sky, balanced himself on tiptoe, and leaned forward in a slow fall toward the charging bull. With a full arm swing, he brought the keen tips of his darts down into the brute's shoulders at the precise moment when the animal was apparently plunging its black horns into his unprotected stomach; but with the down stroke of his darts, the *banderillero* swung his body aside, and the upthrust of the sharp horns touched nothing at all.

The great bulk of the bull brushed aside the fighter's outstretched arms, and the animal dashed past with two new crimson torments dangling in his shoulders and whipping back and forth with every lunge. The man was already flying for the barrier, and he leaped inside a small opening just ahead of the bull's horns.

Another *banderillero,* in purple, with yellow darts, approached from another quarter. He went through the same play, lifting his weapons, leaning forward to strike, swerving aside, and dashing for safety. This one could not gain one of the entrances, and he vaulted over the barrier apparently not an inch from the bull's horns. Everybody was shouting and laughing at the close squeak.

From the direction of the cheap "*sol*" seats of the arena came a spearman in blue. The bull turned on him with undiminished fury. Shouts of "*Ole toro!*" "Brave bull!" "Noble bull!" went up from the amphitheater at the animal's persistent heart.

Quite near Angelito, in a box, two companions, apparently a Venezuelan and an American, were shouting to each other above the applause.

"It's a splendid bull!" cried the Venezuelan to his American guest. "He stands the steel well."

"It's too cruel!" complained the American, who was evidently considering the three pairs of *banderillas* stuck in the bull's shoulders, and the blood that reddened the whole fore part of the animal down past the knees.

"Cruel? *La,* the bull doesn't mind that, *mi amigo*. He is angry. Do you mind a wound when you are angry?"

"But look at him! He is trying to shake the darts out!"

"*Cà,* yes, but in another moment he will forget that pricking!"

The *banderilleros,* who had been playing the bull, now came trotting in from the arena with sweaty faces and heaving breasts. It seemed odd that men in such gay silks should be hot and sweaty. Their bright colors somehow suggested an invincible buoyancy.

At the same moment one of the *monosabios* came running along the aisle between the barrier and the boxes, with a number of rapiers in his arms. The boy hurried out through one of the openings, and offered his blades to Juan Leon. The Spaniard selected one, drew its slender blade from the scabbard, and whipped it in air. Then he glanced courteously at Angelito, as if asking permission, and spread a red silk cape over the rapier, using the blade as a flagstaff.

A burst of renewed applause boiled around the amphitheater at the entry of the famous Juan Leon. This was the beginning of the third and final movement of the bullfight.

The Spaniard advanced through the brilliant sunshine, a solitary black figure with a crimson cape on his rapier, against the infuriated bull. Angelito watched him with the critical eyes of a fellow artist; but there was something so simple and disarming in the great *espada's* approach that he won even the other *torero's* sympathy.

Juan Leon had that peculiar and pervasive possession called personality. That is to say, there was a symbolic quality about the man, so that his adventures became the immediate and singular adventures of every person who beheld him.

The great circular bank of seats sat breathless, gazing fixedly at their *alter ego* as he walked out on the yellow sand against the bull. His courage entered their hearts and became their own. Indeed, for the passing moment he was the object of the throng's great and passionate love, because it was their self-love.

The bull glared at this solitary adversary. The black fighter waved his sword and his crimson cape at the animal. The next moment the thoroughbred flashed at him like a black thunderbolt, and the whole audience was spiritually struggling in the midst of the fight.

The great Spaniard managed his bull with astonishing technique. With dextral and sinistral passes of his silk, he seemed to swing the furious bull to left or right by some magic force of will. The whole amphitheater roared. All the spectators were conquering!

Turning, backing away, evidently at ease yet intensely alert, the great *espada* conducted his raging enemy in a great circle about the arena. He was somehow making the very most possible of the bull.

Suddenly the aristocratic "*sombra*" section of the *circo* realized what Juan Leon was doing. By means of his quiet and finished technique he was subordinating himself in order to exhibit the grace, the speed, the strength, and the monumental lines of the bull.

Came a swift picture of the great black brute charging, horns leveled, head down; now the tremendous upward toss under the whip of red silk; now a front view of the square chest, the lines up the bulging black neck leading to the whipping *banderillas;* then a side view of flying legs and blood-washed shoulders, black against crimson, a repetition of Juan Leon's own costume and the cape he carried; a rear view of lashing tail and immense propelling haunches.

The *diestro* forced from the spectators a sharp admiration, a passionate understanding of the sculptural energy of the brute. He exhibited the prince of fighting in the moment of its greatest fury. The drama passed beyond the bounds of an event in flesh and blood. It breathed an immortal beauty. This charging bull was one with the "Discobolus" or the group of "Laocoon." With the solidity of a statue it blended the color of a painting and the movement and suspense of drama.

In the midst of this play the bull came to a stand. A typhoon of applause beat in from the amphitheater. The *espada* unwrapped his rapier. Its slender glint looked absurd against so huge a foe; yet with it Juan Leon would bring into the spectacle that which all other artistic forms have either mimicked or eschewed—the passing of life, the infinite suggestiveness of death.

With sword bare, the *espada* walked directly toward the ponderous bull. The animal faced him. Leon lifted the hilt of his rapier level with his eyes, with its tip depressed toward the little vulnerable spot between the brute's shoulders. He stood, a composed black figure with a wisp of steel. He stamped his foot at the slavering animal.

Instantly the red-splotched bulk hurtled toward him. With hilt held high and point down, he leaned forward. From the moment when the tip of the thread of steel touched the crimson shoulders, the bull's horns had perhaps thirty inches to go to rip open the *espada's* body; but the great black head never traversed that space.

The shining steel sank into the bull's shoulders. The animal slowed swiftly, as if checked by an invisible buffer in the air. It came to a halt. It shifted its powerful legs in an effort to stand. It swayed a little. Its fore knees folded gently on the sand, and then its haunches settled down, as if to sleep. A moment later the animal rolled over dead.

The audience applauded as deliriously as if every particular hand in the amphitheater had held the rapier. Above the tumult sounded the clear triumph of the bugle announcing the death of the bull.

At the south end of the arena the gates were thrown open, and in jingled the black mules, with their gay harness. They trotted across the arena to the dead body, hitched a chain around its horns, and dragged it out, leaving a furrow in the sand.

The band struck up a blithe air. *Monosabios* hurried out with spades and buckets to fill up the furrow, to level the bull's tracks, and to scoop up the dung that the animal had dropped in its torments.

Joyousness filled the amphitheater, because every spectator had faced down death with glorious courage. All were heroes in Juan Leon. Out of their enthusiasm, out of their self-love, they flung down coins, jewelry, gold cigarette cases. A rain of valuable gewgaws sprinkled the sand. The throng adored their *alter ego*. They were throwing their largess to themselves.

Angelito turned, and looked eagerly among the fluttering boxes for Socorro. After a moment he saw her, with her face glowing, and still clapping her gloved hands. Presently he caught her eyes. She pointed vehemently at Juan Leon and waved her handkerchief.

When the great Spanish artist came back, with his quick, catlike steps, to rejoin his fellow performer, Angelito seized his hands, then put an arm about him and kissed his cheek. This overture drew more applause.

After this Juan Leon dispatched two more bulls with the same silken technique. The fourth bull was given over to Angelito.

XXVIII

A FEELING of the importance of his coming fight filled Angelito as he listened to the heraldic bugle and watched the fourth bull make its dramatic entrance into the arena. It was a splendid red animal. As he studied its swift charges in the preliminary *banderilla* play, he could hear the

American and the Venezuelan still conversing in the box behind him.

Presently the simple opening play was finished, and now the *banderilleros* were pinning the bull with short, brightly colored lances, stuck in pairs atop the rolling shoulder muscles.

The thought that he must advertise himself in this momentous fight pressed more and more strongly on Angelito's mind. His heart gradually quickened in anticipation of the coming fray.

There was another cause of excitement in Angelito—his genuine love of the sport. The sight of the satiny bull thrilled him with the delight that a musician takes in a perfect instrument. The thoroughbred bull was perhaps one-third faster than the creole bulls that Angelito had been fighting; but it had one marked factor of safety —it always charged true. It was, as the *circo* was shouting at that moment, " a noble bull."

Creoles were tricksy devils. Often they lunged, not at the lure, but at the *torero's* body. This red Spanish bull was a superb creature. On it Angelito would illustrate his skill. He would spread before the world the daring that was in his heart. As he watched the play, he began planning a battle worthy of such a foe. On the tide of this *corrida* he would sail into the *circos* of Spain.

As these ambitious thoughts paraded through his head, he had a peculiar feeling of being observed. He glanced around, and caught the eyes of Socorro Jiminez looking intently at him. Her face was white. She shook her head, and made a negative sign with her forefinger.

Angelito saw that she was terrified for his safety. He thought how little she knew of the glory that was dawning for her! He smiled gloriously at her, entranced by the vision of their future career together.

The *banderilleros* had now finished their overture, and the bull had come to a splenetic stand on the sunshot side of the arena. Three pairs of gay lances hung from its bleeding shoulders.

A *monosabio* named Felipe came running around the barrier with rapiers, and offered them for Angelito's selection. He chose one which he had used oftener than any of the others. It was a fine blade with a yellowed ivory handle. It had been given him by an old amateur on his third bullfight after he had come out of the Matadero. That was a fight up on the Orinoco, at Ciudad Bolivar. When he had finished, an old *novillero* had come up, made a handsome speech, and presented him with this valuable sword.

Angelito still recalled phrases of what the old man had said:

" Invincible courage — immortal fame— Mars of the bullfighting world—"

That had been four years ago. Now he was a principal in one of the greatest *corridas* ever given in Venezuela. The old man's prediction was coming true!

As Angelito chose this weapon, he made a certain gesture to another *monosabio*. The lad turned, and went flying behind the barrier to a door that opened into a storeroom under the boxes. Presently he returned, bringing with him an ordinary stout chair.

The whole amphitheater watched intently as the bright green figure approached the bull with the chair in one hand and his cape and sword in the other. The chair piqued the curiosity of the crowd. Such a homely article brought a faint sense of bathos into the drama.

" Milking time!" shouted a voice.

There came a ripple of the laughter of buffoons. It was slight, but it angered Angelito in his wrought up state.

" They will see! They will see!" he thought savagely.

The bull glared at Angelito as he placed the chair on the sand in front of it. The animal seemed to be trying to fathom what new attack and torture this maneuver foreshadowed.

Quite deliberately the *torero* sat in the chair, leaned back, and crossed his legs in the most indolent attitude; but every instant he was taut, ready to whip aside from danger.

Still leaning back, balanced on the hind posts of his chair, the fighter whipped his cape and sword at the bull. Instantly the red monster charged.

There came a blur of action, a sort of massive prestidigitation. The chair flew high in air, but the green figure was seen standing just to one side of the bull's furious follow through.

Angelito thrilled to this intimate grazing of destruction. The animal-scented aura of the bull enveloped him. The brute wheeled. Simultaneously the fighter gauged the distance of the whirling bull and watched the fall of the chair. It fell, turning over and over. He watched it with the concentration of a juggler. He reached up his free arm, caught and controlled its whirl, brought it down on the sand, and sat in it, so nearly simultaneously that it gave a fantastic impression that the *torero* had never budged from his position, but had dropped out of the air firmly seated in the chair.

Laughter and applause filled the cheap "*sol*" section of the amphitheater. Its occupants broke into a roar of applause when the great red bull charged a second time, tossed the chair again, and a second time Angelito caught it and instantly resumed his seat. This extraordinary feat was performed in swift succession four or five times, amid the growing uproar of the audience.

"*Bravos!*" and "*Oles!*" roared out of the poorer half of the *circo*. Sombreros were flung on the sand. The multitude howled ecstatically at this exhibition of acrobatic skill, while here and there on the "*sombra*" side a few hands clapped. From the aristocratic half came disparaging calls:

"Juggler! Acrobat!"

This strange division of the amphitheater into "hot" and "cold" stung Angelito. He was a juggler and an acrobat because his exhibition of muscular skill was treading on the heels of an extraordinary æsthetic spectacle.

The peon in the ring had no sense of this stultifying sequence. A kind of fury to succeed tingled through him. Somehow he was not grasping his immense opportunity. He was losing half—the more consequential half—of the *circo*.

He flung himself more recklessly into his play, and the bull retorted with a fury equal to his own. The huge animal plunged beneath his outstretched arms, and wheeled to charge again. Angelito placed his cape behind his back, and offered his lithe body as a target for the needle horns. The creature lunged; the fighter slued aside. The bull flashed past in a whirl of hot, rank air, and flung up the red silk behind the *torero*. It was the same sort of razor-edged, uncomfortable performance as that of a knife thrower in vaudeville.

The "*sol*" section, filled with peons, was boiling with applause. This jugglery, this grazing of destruction, was of their very stripe. The daredevil fighter was playing with a Spanish bull exactly as he would toy with a *novillo!*

Such continued one-sided applause loosed a regular fury of recklessness in the athlete. At the next charge of the red beauty, the *torero* whirled, laid a hand on the broad red back among the *banderillas*, and sprinted over the sand by the creature's side. The brute whirled, and tried to reach him. The man whirled with it. Bull and man became involved in a spinning circle—red, with a green center. The whole was a blur, a dizzy gyration.

Even the aristocratic "*sombra*" broke into an uproar at this terrible spinning. A thousand voices broke out:

"*Ole! Bravo! Magnifico!* What a man! *Ole! Bravo! Bravo!*"

In the boxes, even the American visitor was lifted to his feet.

"Go it, baby!" he cried. "I'm for yeh, though I don't see how the hell you'll ever get out of there!"

To Angelito, the amphitheater was revolving in a blur of color. Suddenly reversing his straining muscles, he flung himself out of the vortex past the bull's tail. The fighter checked the dizzy swing of his eyes, and stood poised and facing the animal. The din of the spectators shook his ears.

He had meant to kill the animal now, but he was just capturing the aristocrats, and this universal pandemonium spurred him on to a last *tour de force*. He would give an exhibition of daring that would overwhelm the amphitheater.

As the bull charged again, he ran backward toward the "*sombra*" side. He was aware when he passed out of the slanting sunshine into the shadow. He saw the long blue shadow sweep over the furious bull as it came at him head down.

This time Angelito did not lure the bull to one side with his cape. He stood on tiptoe, with one foot a little in advance of the other, as if he meant to sprint at the charging bull.

As the huge red brute hurtled in, Angelito caught an impression of the short red bristles at the base of the horns, the terrific bulge of the red neck, the swinging *banderillas*. Now it was on him. He placed one foot between the bull's horns, and, with the terrific uptoss, he leaped.

The whole amphitheater gasped, and thundered in applause. Angelito's daring had peonized even the critical taste of the "*sombra*." He had bludgeoned it into a crude, primitive worship of rashness and peril. He had effaced the cool aristocratic universe of ideal beauty. He had won!

With the tremendous heave of the bull's head, Angelito felt himself rise in air, and glimpsed the broad red back of the bull flashing under him. Suddenly, amid the terrific strain, he felt a hot, tearing pain in his side, where Señor Montauban had thrust through his muscles. This exquisite agony destroyed the catlike poise that would have dropped him on his feet again. The yellow sand swung up and struck him a trifle sidewise. His feet tripped, and he fell heavily.

In his pain, Angelito saw the bull whirl and lunge back at him. Beyond the bull came the bright figures of Juan Leon and the *banderilleros* dashing toward him; but the great beast was upon him again.

He tried desperately to roll out of its way. The lowered head and sharp black horns were right over him—the smell of the animal—the whole universe shaking about him, shot through with profound agony. He felt himself lifted. The amphitheater seemed to swing up and down, into the sunshine, into the shadow, the sunshine, the shadow.

The bull had tossed him twice.

The American spectator was getting out of his box with shaking legs and a chalky face. His Venezuelan companion was begging him to stay. The fight would go on. It would not end until this bull and two others had been killed.

A box party of Venezuelans and a gentleman from the press box were also hurriedly leaving the bullfight. They entered a large motor outside, and drove rapidly in the direction of Paraiso.

A little later, an ambulance rattled from behind the gloomy red pile of the *circo,* clanging a bell for the crowd in the plaza to make way. An old peon woman with a sheaf of lottery tickets came stumbling after the clanging vehicle, screaming:

"*Mi hijo! Mi hijo!*"

The crowd in the plaza were poor people who had not enough money to see the fight. They stared after the rattling ambulance and after the old woman, and told one another, with widened eyes, that one of the *toreros* had been killed or wounded.

"God's lightning, and me outside!"

They cursed their ill luck with great bitterness.

Presently a renewed tumult boiled up in the enormous red bowl. The multitude drew close again, and listened more feverishly than ever as the fight went on.

XXIX

Señora Jiminez insisted, with a masterly massing of argument, that her daughter, Socorro Jiminez, should not accompany the funeral procession to the cemetery. Socorro, she said, was physically unfit for the exertion. There was no need of stressing the fact of her recent engagement. The whole affair had been somewhat veiled; and so, considering everything, it would be best not to go.

Of course, Socorro would remain her six months in mourning—black was very becoming to the girl—and of course poor Narciso could come around occasionally to cheer her up. There could be nothing inappropriate in that, when one considered everything.

In point of fact, the funeral procession was very small, and, as the *señora* afterward pointed out, when she heard her son's description of it, it would never have done for Socorro to be seen in such a crowd; so she had been right, after all.

Services for the dead fighter were held in the church of the Candelaria, and here were gathered a number of peons from the neighborhood of Traposo Calle; but old Ana declined to hire carriages, and no crowd of Venezuelans can walk.

The cortège that went to the cemetery consisted of the hearse, and old Ana and Rafael Jiminez in a cab. Behind them came some little boys, who had found out that the dead man had been a bullfighter. With the fealty of boys to their heroes, they made the long, hot march through the sunshine to the cemetery.

The cemetery in Caracas is a large inclosure, with fine tombs and carefully kept burial plots in the foreground, but, in the manner of all things Venezuelan, its after part is weed-grown and unkempt. The walls around this part of it are thick and high, and are, in reality, long tiers of vaults for the reception of the poverty-stricken dead. In these vaults the bodies of the poor are sealed up for so long a space of time as the family can or will pay the rent. Then the bones are taken out and thrown into a ditch among the weeds at the back of the burial ground.

Old Ana rented a vault for her son, even as she had rented one, years ago, for her husband. In the mortuary chapel at the entrance of the cemetery the last services were held for the dead bullfighter. In the chapel the body lay in state in a magnificent coffin, but this, too, was only rented for the ceremony. A little later, the corpse was transferred to a very cheap, plain box, and was placed in one of the vaults in the wall.

All this old Ana did neither cynically nor unlovingly, but with the utmost grief and affection for her dead son. It was the custom of peons.

Rafael Jiminez was the only aristocrat at the burial. He stood for a long time watching the old woman as she knelt sobbing among the weeds that skirted the vaults. The hot sunshine fell over the wall, the weeds, and the weeping old woman. The ditch into which all the bones were finally flung exhaled a noisome and penetrating odor, which reminded Rafael of the bull ring.

Toward the front of the cemetery rose the marbled and flowered tombs of the aristocrats. The poet's thoughts flowed on and on in a sad, wistful reverie. The handsome tombs spoke to him of the incurable vanity of his class. It reacted on himself, and shamed his endless making of verses.

This futile, foolish aristocracy had been the one goal of Angelito's life, but into it he had never crossed. However, he had succeeded in one thing. Rafael knew that his sister would never cease to love the man whom they were laying to rest to-day in this cheap vault of the poor. The only power that could ever have shaken Socorro's passion for the bullfighter was Angelito himself, and now his voice was stilled.

He knew that in time to come Socorro would marry Narciso Montauban, as he himself would eventually marry Margarita Miraflores. *Pues*, it was all very well!

The woman whom he had so long and so barrenly desired, that exquisite, understanding, and passionate woman whom the fancy of his adolescence had painted—she either could not be found or did not exist at all; but his sister Socorro had known a man who had moved her to the very foundation of her being. A glimpse had been vouchsafed her. Evanescent it was, and perhaps its continuance would have been impossible; but for her one short day, at least, she had lived.

In his heart Rafael was glad of that. He was thankful that this one little crumb of immortality had dropped into his sister's lap from the banquet of the indifferent gods.

THE END

COMPENSATION

Prayers that were never said,
  Vows that were never spoken—
These might have comforted
  A heart long broken.

The song we did not sing,
  The wish we never cherished—
Unborn, how may these bring
  Peace, when dreams have perished?

That way we never went,
  That sunrise, lost through sleeping—
Is there a far event
  Where beauty shall come creeping,

To give us all we lost
  And all she might have given?
Oh, piteous were the cost
  If that should not be heaven!

Charles Hanson Towne

No. 2630 *Eveready 2-Cell Tubular Flashlight.*

For that dark closet -
use your flashlight!

MORE light for all the dark places of your house. Instant light. Safe light. Keep a flashlight in each of those much-used closets. Tie tapes around them. Hang them where they will be instantly convenient. Don't stumble! Have another at the top of those dark cellar stairs. Don't fumble! Have another at your bedside for sudden needs at night.

Keep them loaded with Eveready Unit Cells and you will have plenty of bright, white light where and when you need it.

If you have a flashlight not in use, get it out and reload it with Eveready Unit Cells; long-lived cartridges of brilliant light. Buy them from any electrical or hardware dealer, drug, sporting goods or general store, garage or auto accessory shop.

When you buy new flashlights, be sure they have EVEREADY stamped on the end. EVEREADY means the highest standard of flashlight quality, and Eveready Unit Cells give more light longer. Prices from 65c to $4.50 complete with battery—anywhere in the U. S. A.

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
New York San Francisco
Canadian National Carbon Co., Limited
Factory and Offices: Toronto, Ontario

EVEREADY
FLASHLIGHTS
& BATTERIES
—they last longer.

EVEREADY UNIT CELLS *make all flashlights better.*

Eveready Unit Cells fit and improve all makes of flashlights. Eveready Unit Cells come in two sizes to fit every tubular case flashlight. Know the Eveready size that fits your case. Then you can buy new Eveready Unit Cells without bothering to take your flashlight along. Eveready Unit Cells mean brighter flashlights and longer battery life.

Four out of Five are Victims

Will Pyorrhea claim you, too? Make Forhan's your aid

Pyorrhea plays no favorites. Records prove that it has marked for its own four out of every five over forty years of age, and thousands younger.

Heed Nature's warning—tender, bleeding gums—before it's too late. Better still, check Pyorrhea before it starts by going to your dentist regularly—and brushing your teeth twice a day with Forhan's For the Gums.

At all druggists—35c and 60c.

Forhan's

FOR THE GUMS

More than a tooth paste—it checks Pyorrhea

It's a hobby of lots

of men to wear a particular kind of shoe.

It's a hobby of The Crawford Shoe to please particular men.

The Crawford Shoe is a real shoe for men—a shoe that is built right, priced right, and that wears right.

It won't run over or squash out of shape.

It fits snugly at the heel, doesn't gap at the ankle. Smart and comfortable.

A try-on costs you nothing and it's sure worth trying.

The Crawford Shoe

MOST STYLES

$8

CHARLES A. EATON SHOE INDUSTRIES

BROCKTON, MASS.

© 1923

Read

The Handwriting On The Wall

A remarkable mystery and detective story by David Fox, dealing with a new problem in crime.

This unusual story begins in the March 29 issue of ARGOSY-ALLSTORY.

Freshen up the Fairy way!

DIP into the foamy lather that Fairy Soap makes! See how easily and quickly you can rinse it off. Then get the clean refreshing feeling that only a perfectly pure white soap can give.

It's the feeling of true skin health. For Fairy Soap clears the pores—expels impurities—and gives the healthy glow of new skin vigor.

Fairy Soap is purity personified. It's white through and through—and fragrant with a delicately elusive perfume.

The oval cake is soap in its handiest form. Most convenient for toilet or bath. And economical because it wears to a thin wafer without break or waste.

It's white! It's pure! It floats!

FAIRY SOAP

A Prest-O-Lite Product

WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF ACETYLENE, "THE GAS OF A THOUSAND USES."

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Can You Afford to Buy An Unknown Battery For Your Car?

For your whole electrical system, the maker of your car insists on a name which means an earned reputation for perfection of manufacture and constant, faithful operation.

Is it sensible then for you to take chances on an unknown battery which is the very heart of the electrical system?

Is it reasonable to suppose that the unknown is as good a battery as an institution like Prest-O-Lite produces?

Behind that name lie the experience and reputation for character and integrity of manufacture built up through 20 years of service to the motoring public. Behind the Prest-O-Lite Battery stand the resources of Prest-O-Lite and—most valuable to you—the national spread of Prest-O-Lite service known everywhere as the "Friendly Service."

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For your Radio get assured performance in The Prest-O-Lite Radio Battery.

Prest-O-Lite

THE OLDEST SERVICE TO MOTORISTS

TEN YEARS' PROGRESS

for Economical Transportation

CHEVROLET

1914 SPECIFICATIONS

Horsepower, S. A. E.	21.7
Weight	2500 lbs.
Tires, 32 x 3½, fabric (about 4000 miles)	
Top	Two-man, with side supports
Gas feed	Air pressure
Windshield	Folding
Rims	Detachable
Cooling	Thermo system
Rear axle gears	Straight teeth
Oiling system	Splash
Chassis lubrication	Grease cups
Back curtain light	Celluloid
Side curtains	Stationary
Finish	Paint, air dried
Gasoline mileage	About 18
Service brake	Clutch combination
Wiring harness	Open
Insurance rating	B
Terms	Cash
Service stations	About 1000

1924 SPECIFICATIONS

Horsepower, S. A. E.	21.7
Weight	1880 lbs.
Tires, 30 x 3½, fabric (about 8000 miles) (*Cord Tires on all closed models*)	
Top	One man
Gas feed	Suction
Windshield	Double ventilating
Rims	Demountable
Cooling	Pump circulation
Rear axle gears	Spiral bevel
Oiling system	Pump, forced feed
Chassis lubrication	Alemite
Back curtain light	Glass
Side curtains	Open with doors
Finish	Baked enamel
Gasoline mileage	About 24
Service brake	Separate brake pedal
Wiring harness	In conduits
Insurance rating	A
Terms	As desired
Service stations	About 20,000

No. 1 Chevrolet

Price, 1914, $1000

Present Chevrolet

Price, 1924, $495

THE pronounced leadership of the automobile business in restoring the old-time purchasing power of the dollar is best illustrated in the increased quality and decreased price of a Chevrolet.

The reductions in prices have more than doubled the purchasing power of the consumer's dollar, although the specifications and design show marked increase in quality.

Big volume production made these economies possible. Note the ten years' record of Chevrolet sales:

Ten Years' Record of Chevrolet Sales

1914— 5,005	1919—151,019
1915— 13,500	1920—155,647
1916— 69,682	1921— 77,627
1917—125,399	1922—242,373
1918— 93,814	1923—483,310

We are the world's largest manufacturers of quality cars, having attained this leadership through offering the utmost possible per dollar value in modern quality automobiles.

Before buying any car at any price *See Chevrolet First.*

Chevrolet Motor Company, Detroit, Michigan

Division of General Motors Corporation

Five United States manufacturing plants, seven assembly plants and two Canadian plants give us the largest production capacity in the world for high-grade cars and make possible our low prices. Chevrolet Dealers and Service Stations everywhere. Applications will be considered from high grade dealers only, for territory not adequately covered.

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Superior Roadster	$490	Superior Commercial Chassis	$395
Superior Touring	495	Superior Light Delivery	495
Superior Utility Coupe	640	Utility Express Truck Chassis	550
Superior 4-Pass. Coupe	725		
Superior Sedan	795		

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Are You Earning $100 a Week?

Big JOBS Open

Would you like to be a star salesman? Men who have mastered salesmanship—who are really proficient—name their own salaries. $5,000 to $10,000 a year and better not uncommon. Big money and opportunities in business always open to men who can SELL. Success in selling field leads to highest executive positions. Demand enormous. Old theory about "born salesman" exploded. Any man of average intelligence can now learn to sell thru scientific coaching. Training, the secret. Write today for free book, "MODERN SALESMANSHIP." It tells how you can quickly get into the selling game and win your way to the big-pay jobs. Learn in spare hours at home principles and methods of ablest sales organizations in America. Successful salesmen report sales doubled and trebled thru scientific study of salesmanship under LaSalle Problem Method. Low tuition fee—easy terms. Write now for information.

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☐ Industrial Management Efficiency
☐ Banking and Finance
☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
☐ Personnel and Employment Management
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Present Position..........
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I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with my Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. They stop head-noises. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I became deaf and how I make you hear. Address

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Guaranteed 5 Years.

Sold on easy payments to good people. Send for Catalog today.

N. Buchstein Co., 610 3rd Ave., S. Minneapolis. Minn.

The
Handwriting On The Wall

By David Fox

A mystery and detective story of unusual strength and special appeal, dealing with an organization of sleuths made up of former lawbreakers who have turned their talents toward the detection of crime instead of its commission.

This story begins in March 29 issue of ARGOSY-ALLSTORY.

Do You Need A Bust in the Nose

before you start to fight? Do you need this kind of treatment to bring you to your senses? If you are that kind of a fellow, the chances are strong that you are going to get it.

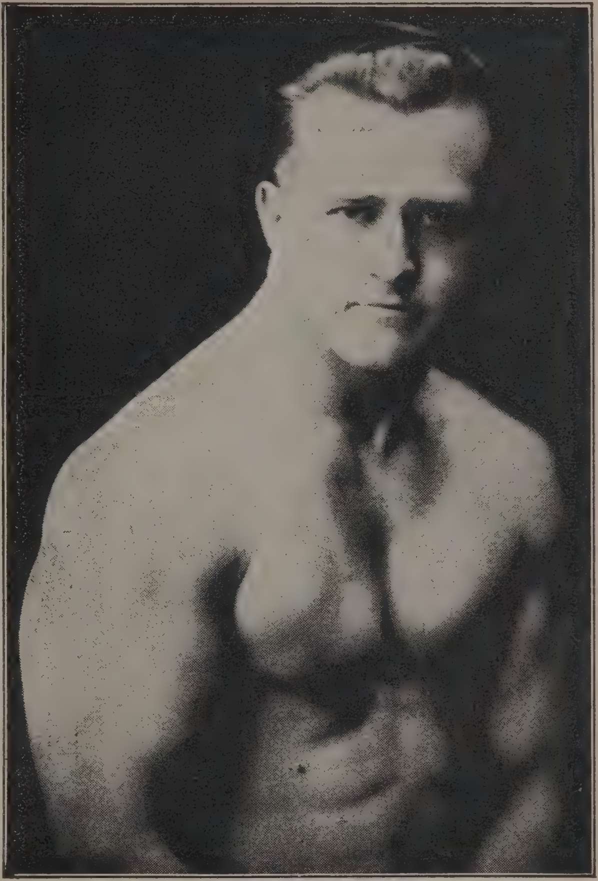
Be Ready

I don't recommend that you be a rowdy who goes around looking for a fight. But I do believe you should be alert and, when the time comes, be prepared to beat the other fellow to the punch.

The Wise Man

Some men never pay any attention to the condition of their house till it begins to fall on their head. Others watch for the first sign of a crack and immediately have it put in condition. How about the house you live in—your body? Are you going to let it clog up and waste away until you suddenly realize you have tuberculosis or some other dreadful, incurable disease? Get wise! Check up on yourself! Put your body in shape and keep it so.

An apple is no good unless you eat it. Let it lie, and it will rot away. Let your muscles lie idle and they will waste away, but *use your muscles and you have more muscle to use.*



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"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

It is Free

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Many of these are leaders in their business professions today. I have not only given them a body to be proud of, but made them better doctors, lawyers, merchants, etc. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. All I ask is 10 cents to cover cost of wrapping and mailing. For the sake of your future happiness, send for your copy today—right now—before you forget it!

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Unless you see the "Bayer Cross" on package or on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer Aspirin proved safe by millions and prescribed by physicians over twenty-three years for

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Toothache	Lumbago
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She Found A Pleasant Way To Reduce Her Fat

She did not have to go to the trouble of diet or exercise. She found a better way, which aids the digestive organs to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

She used *Marmola Prescription Tablets* which are made from the famous Marmola prescription. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They will allow you to eat many kinds of food without the necessity of dieting or exercising.

Thousands have found that the *Marmola Prescription Tablets* give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

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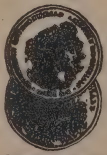
Stop Using a Truss



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STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made self-adhesive purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. No straps, buckles or spring attached—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

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betrayed

Their first conversation betrayed the fact that she was not fastidious.

AT a distance she had appeared unusually neat, immaculate. But upon their first face-to-face meeting he discovered that her teeth were not clean. And he soon lost interest.

So many people overlook this one matter of fastidiousness. And do so in spite of the fact that in conversation the teeth are the one most noticeable thing about you.

Notice today how you, yourself, watch another person's teeth when he or she is talking. If the teeth are not well kept they at once become a liability.

Listerine Tooth Paste cleans teeth a new way. At last our chemists have discovered a polishing ingredient that really cleans without scratching the enamel—a difficult problem—finally solved.

You will notice the improvement even in the first few days. And you *know it is cleaning safely.*

So the makers of Listerine, the safe antiseptic, have found for you also the really safe dentifrice.

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TOOTH PASTE

Large Tube—25 cents

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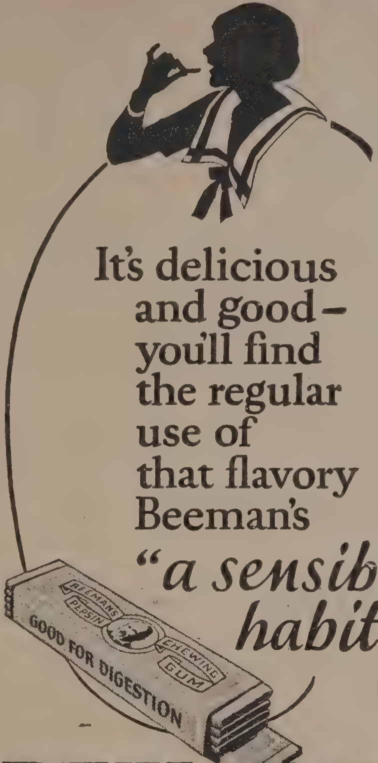

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"a sensible habit"

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Relief *for* coughs

Use PISO'S—this prescription quickly relieves children and adults. A pleasant syrup. No opiates.

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$100 Brilliant, Blue White Diamond Solid 18-k White Gold Delivered on first payment of $10, then **$2.50 A WEEK.**

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We will prove its value in your own case. There is no reason why you should not accept our offer. The photographs show how light, cool, elastic and easily adjusted the Philo Burt Appliance is—how different from the old torturous plaster, leather or steel jackets.

Every sufferer with a weakened or deformed spine owes it to himself to investigate thoroughly. Price within reach of all.

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If you will describe the case it will aid us in giving you definite information at once.

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As a mouthwash, gargle and *to prevent infection*

That never-empty place in medicine cabinets belongs to Absorbine, Jr.

As a mouthwash it is germ destroying, cleansing and refreshing.

As a gargle it soothes and relieves an irritated or swollen sore throat.

With a dentifrice it gets at crevice-hidden germs; keeps brush clean.

With a shampoo it destroys dandruff germs and stimulates the scalp.

It is delightful after shaving and a first aid for cuts and scratches.

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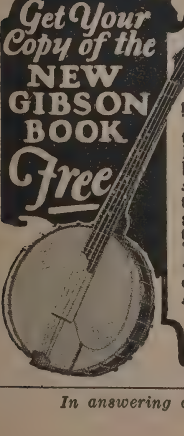

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TWO BLUE SAPPHIRES

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Send $2.00 as a deposit and we'll send this handsome diamond ring. Then pay only **$6.70 a month for 10 months** until bargain price of $69.00 is paid. Former price $100.00. All credit dealings strictly confidential. WRITE FOR CATALOG. It gives the exact weights and qualities of diamonds. Read valuable information on page 6.

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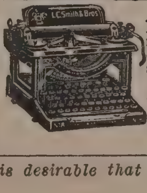

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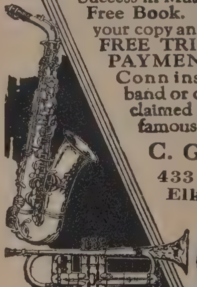

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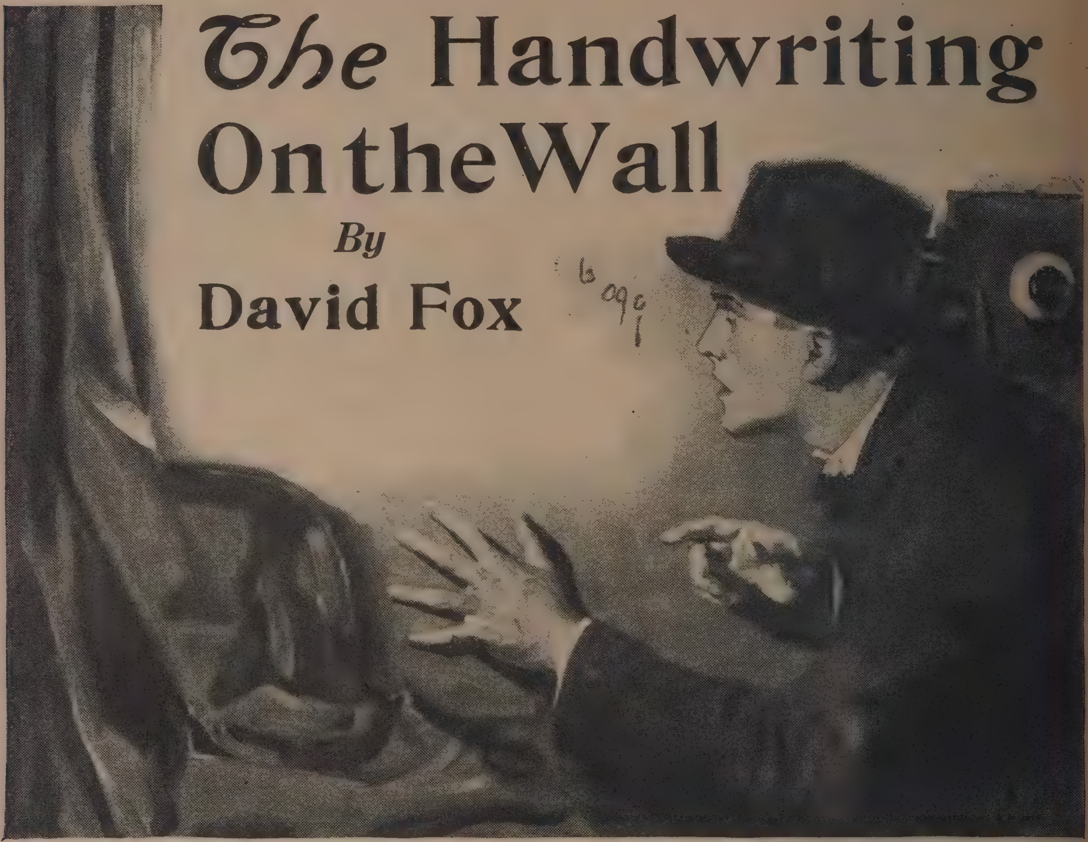

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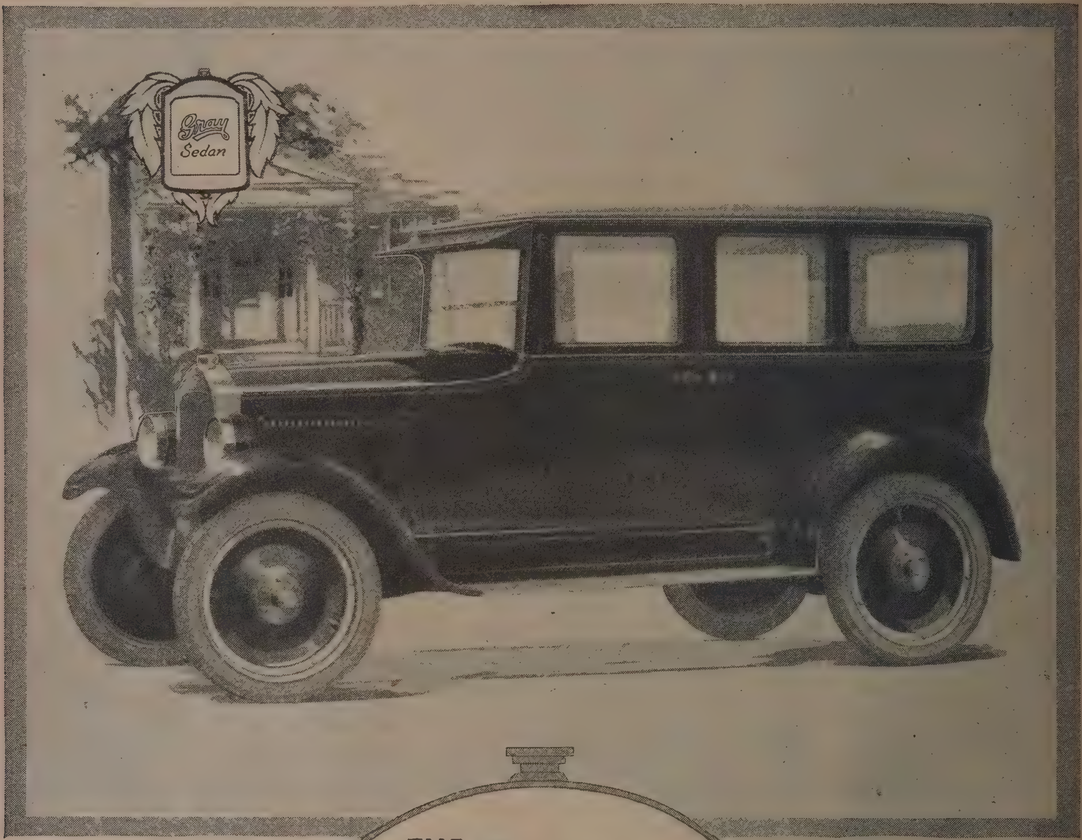

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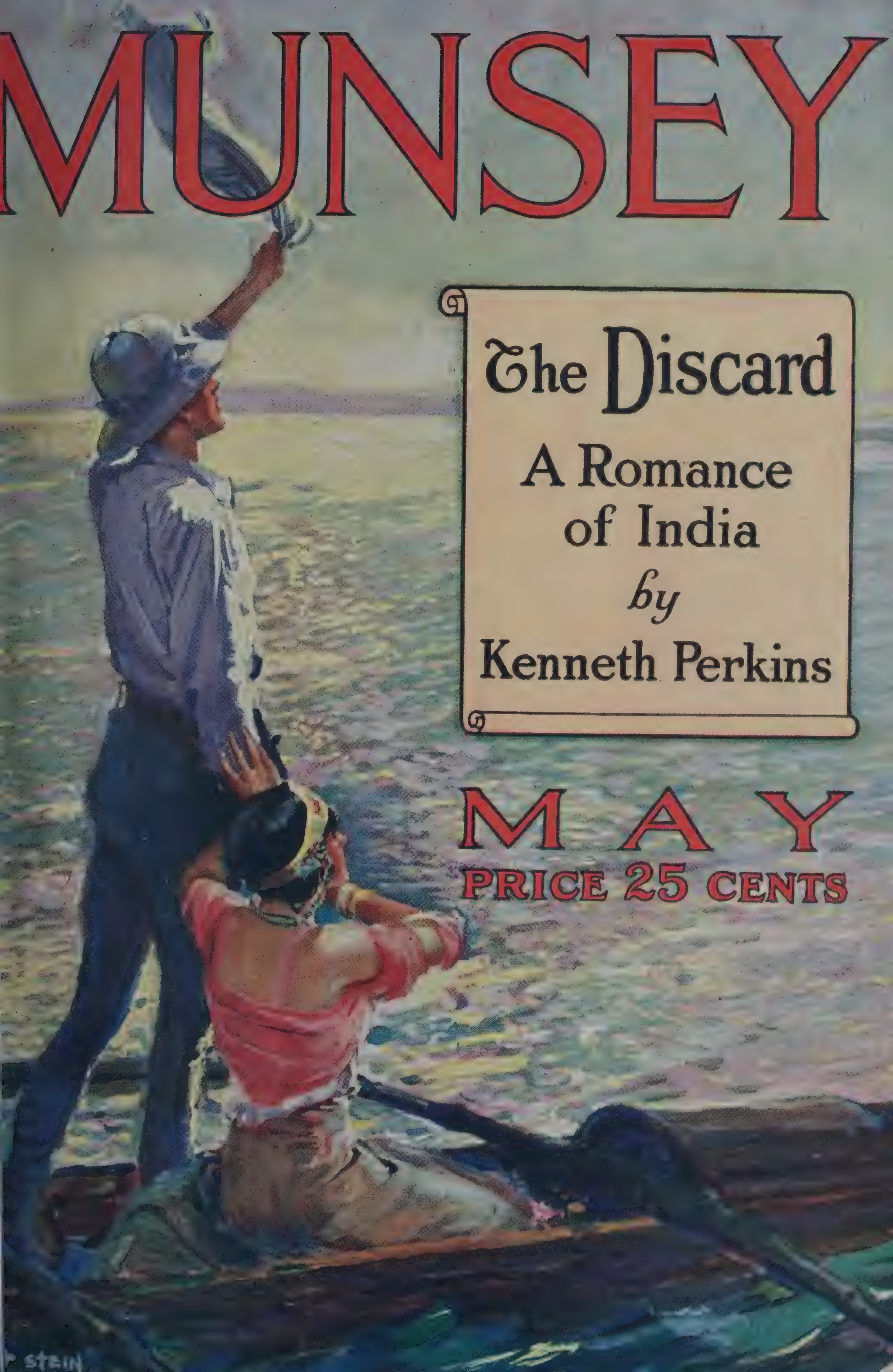

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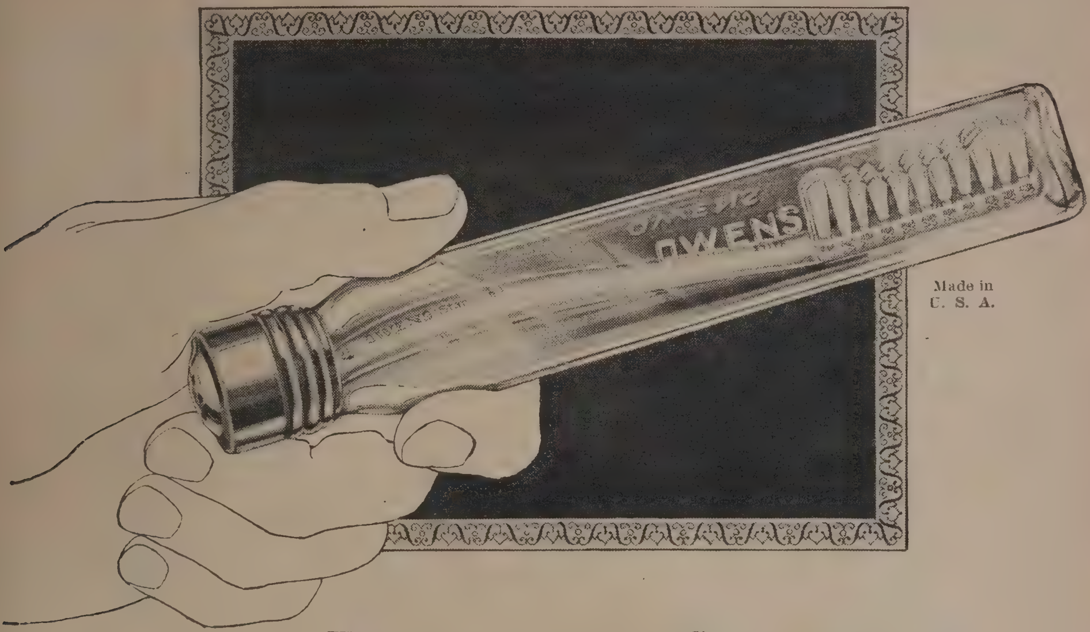

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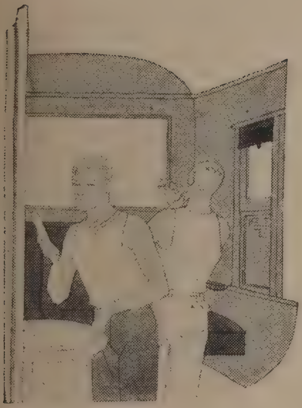

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CONTENTS FOR

VOL. LXXXI MAY 1924 NUMBER 4

Serial Stories

THE DISCARD (Chapters I-VII) . . . . Kenneth Perkins 602

POISON IVY (Chapters IX-XIV) . . . . . . Louis Lacy Stevenson 637

SUSPICION (Chapters XIV-XX) . . . . Reita Lambert 676

THE TWISTED FOOT (Chapters XXIV-XXXII) William Patterson White 712

THE TOKEN (Chapters XXIV-XXVII) . . . . Louis Tracy 757

Short Stories and Novelette

Beyond the Pole (Novelette) . . . . Philip M Fisher, Jr 577

Scars . . . . L M. Hussey 625

The Black Fox . . . . William Byron Mowery 632

Out of His Class . . . . J Frank Davis 659

The Gold Brocade . . . . Morgan Burke 667

The Piper . . . . Luke Thomas 697

A Flame-Colored Evening Gown . . . . . . M. L. Storrs 703

The Grocer Earl . . . . Elizabeth Marc 740

The Cherry Velvet Ribbon . . . . Mariel Brady 749

Poems

The Voyager . . . . F. L. Montgomery 601

When Psyche Smiles William Wallace Whitelock 636

The Miracles of Spring . . . Charles Divine 658

My Patchwork Coverlet . Elizabeth M. Montague 696

An Invitation . . . . Richard Leigh 739

A Ballade of Simple Bodies . Richard Le Gallienne 748

Youth Sings of Age . . Nelle Richmond Eberhart 756

A Day on the Riviera . . . Anita Dudley 768

THE JUNE MUNSEY (on sale Tuesday, May 20) will contain a complete novelette, "The Snob Splendid," a story of the California mountains by that clever and popular writer, Alice Rix, and the opening chapters of "Wide Waters," a stirring romance of the sea by the well known sailor novelist, Captain Dingle

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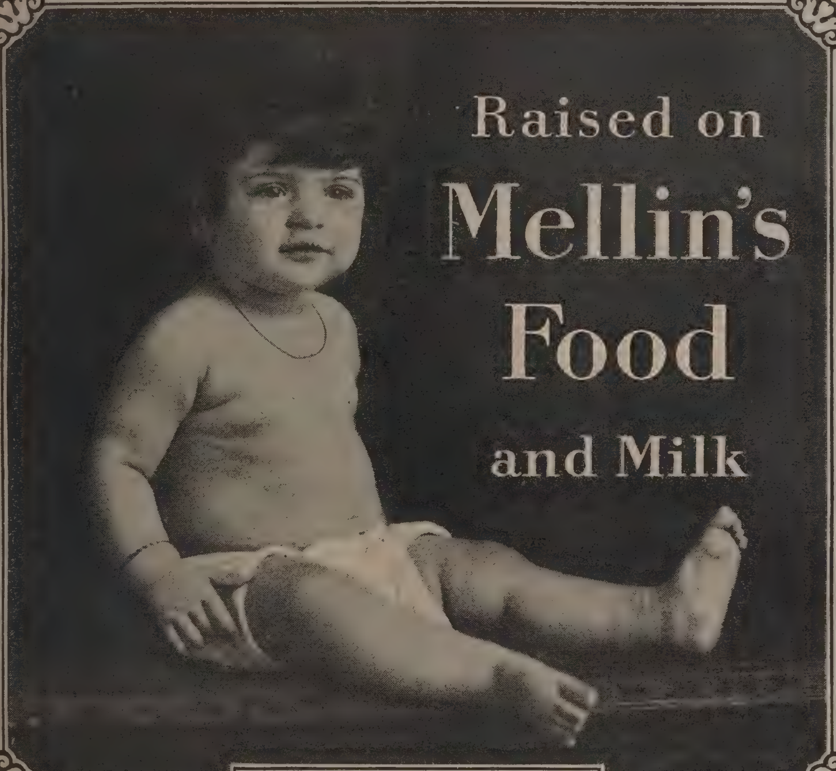

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Beyond the Pole

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STRANGE STORY OF THE UNITED STATES DIRIGIBLE AIRCRAFT RAPPAHANNOCK'S VOYAGE TO THE ARCTIC

By Philip M. Fisher, Jr.

Author of "Dragon's Breath," "Fungus Isle," etc.

YOU remember, of course, the days succeeding the armistice of November 11, 1918. You recall the treaty of Versailles, the covenant of the League of Nations. You cannot have forgotten the division among the allied nations of the war craft of the fallen empire, those left after that memorable night in Scapa Flow. You are proud of our largest merchant ship, the Leviathan, once hailed as the Vaterland, Teutonia's greatest. You heard stories of Zeppelins — huge, threatening shadows of the upper air. Do you recall what was done with *them,* you sons and daughters of democracy?

This, then, is the history of one.

The Z 397 was completed in its home factory on the 10th of November, 1918. Its martial destiny was thwarted by signatures scrawled upon parchment on the succeeding day. What happened to it, then, this greatest of all aircraft, this cunningest of all ships of the sky? Was it sunk by a morale-broken crew in the salt water of a Scottish inlet? Was it burned in the great hangar that was its man-made womb? Was it passed over to a European foe? The government was silent, the newspapers were dumb.

There may have been reason for this. As to that I cannot say. Perhaps it was to sail in upon San Francisco, a surprise to the nation. Perhaps it was secretly taken over in order that no other of the Allies might suspect. Perhaps—and to this conjecture I strongly hold—the officials who made the turn already had inklings of a plan.

However it be, the Z 397, with a crew chosen from the air force of the United

States Navy, sailed from Germany—across the bleak and saddened Russias — to the Far East. At the same time, under secret orders, there steamed from San Francisco, to the northwestward, a fat-bellied vessel. The two met—there are isles among the Aleutians whither no man goes but he who bears a secret word from Washington. The ship of the sea tarried there for three months—long enough to see a temporary mooring built for the ship of the air. Then, bearing no news from the Far North, it returned to its home on the coast. The Z 397 remained, securely moored, behind the high cliffs of Aluakat Island—a secret prize. It wintered there, cared for through blizzard months by its doting, patriotic, but still uninformed and wondering crew.

In the spring the steamer sailed to Aluakat again—with supplies and sealed packets. In its hold was a precious cargo of the newest lifting force, compressed almost to liquidity in steel containers, sent to San Francisco by a dozen different routes, billed to half a hundred different consignees, governmental secrecy covering all—the element hailed with hope by men who love the air —the noninflammable gas, helium.

On May 6 of 1920, when the last retiring rage of spring had passed, the great aircraft, renamed the Rappahannock, took to the air and pointed her seven-hundred-foot cigar-shaped bulk for the north pole.

The position of Aluakat Island is approximately in latitude fifty-two north and longitude one hundred and seventy west. Meridians of longitude, as the reader knows, converge to meet at common points, the north and south poles. The Rappahannock navigated so as to follow that of one hundred and seventy west, driving rapidly northward.

A degree of latitude comprises sixty minutes—a minute of latitude is approximately one sea mile. The speed of the Rappahannock was set at sixty sea miles, or about sixty-nine land miles, per hour. Each hour, by radio, came information that the great ship, following the one hundred and seventieth meridian, had pushed northward one degree.

The latitude of Aluakat is fifty-two north, as has been stated. Thirty-eight degrees, then, left of the ninety between equator and pole must be traversed to reach the northern cap of our planet. This, with all going as planned, would be accomplished in thirty-eight hours.

As hour after hour passed, and report after report came in, how I cursed the broken leg that at the last moment had prevented my going! How I longed to be with that pioneer crew of airmen in the frozen North! How bitterly I cursed my fate! Yet now how I shudder to think what I might have been, had not Providence been so kind!

Report after report—all going well. Engines in rhythmic harmony—navigation instruments smoothly recording — altitude easily held. Hour after hour—degree after degree! Ten hours more, and the pole would be theirs!

Nine hours — vast smooth blanket of white the earth beneath, great crystal-clear vault of blue the sky overhead—no wind—all going well—better even than anticipated. How I cursed!

Eight hours more. Seven, six, five, four, three—

The radio operator broke in upon me, breathing hard. My broken leg had left me in charge.

" No report, sir! I've tried and tried for them—can't raise a sound."

That his face was rather white made no impression upon me. My own must have reached a paler hue.

" You've kept in touch with them?"

He nodded eagerly, his blue eyes slightly bulging.

" Up to the last moment, sir. Then there was a minute with nothing coming in. Operator waiting for ship's position from the bridge, I thought. Been that way before each hourly report."

He threw out his hands hopelessly.

" I waited five minutes, sir; then I couldn't hold in longer. I tried for them—no answer. I tuned for their auxiliary radio, thinking the main outfit might have gone out on 'em—no answer. I switched back—no answer. My God, sir!"

He leaned close to me where I sat with my plastered leg on a board, and bulged those pale eyes into my very face.

" My God, sir! What has happened?"

For a moment I was dizzy. My own brother, who had gone into the balloon division of our air service at the outset of the war, was commander of the Rappahannock.

All going well! For thirty-five degrees of the distance to the pole—all going well! Hope at its highest! Anticipation—success! Later, news to all the world—" Americans on secret trip win out!" And now, within three degrees—a short hundred and eighty miles—no report!

"Back!" I cried, raising myself with a mighty effort. "Back, and try again!"

I saw the man stare at me, tears on his cheeks. I dimly heard him say:

"Aye, aye, sir. My relief is—"

"Go! Have me carried—"

And then I must have wrenched my leg too severely, for I fainted dead away.

II

The Rappahannock, as I have said, set full speed ahead at eight o'clock on that clear, calm morning of May 6, 1920. For thirty-four hours thereafter she sent us regular reports of her successful maintenance of speed and course. The pole was almost within her sight. Then, when more than twenty-one hundred miles of her voyage had been covered, when the thirty-fifth report should have come in, at seven o'clock of the evening of the 7th of May, there was none. There was nothing but silence.

All through the night—a night that was continuous twilight day in that northern post—we labored, exhorting all the gods of things electric to break through the silence and bring us hope.

They carried me to the radio room, that I might be forced to believe that all was being done that could be done. My own knowledge of radio was brought into play—and it was not little, for my brother and I had made special study of the subject in its relationship to the new science of aërial navigation.

Two long distance sets were in constant readiness in that little double-walled compartment. One and then the other, alternating, were brought into play. The three experts and myself took watch and watch at each set, that the personal factor might be eliminated and every chance made more secure. By midnight we still had caught no word from out the crystal air.

In that high latitude there was static, yes—it snapped and crashed and roared; but static had snapped and crashed and roared during the hours when we had kept continual touch, during the thirty-four hours when reports had steadily come in from the ever distancing ship. Static was expected, and our instruments were prepared for its elimination as far as possible.

I could comprehend now, with a mind beginning to feel the bitterness of our situation, why those who had planned this expedition from the very beginning had so carefully chosen the radio men accompanying the Rappahannock from its hangar in far-off Germany. I could see now why John Grimes, professor of electricity of the Boston School of Technology, and his associate from the Edison laboratories, Dr. Lawrence Hemphill, had been mysteriously added to our party before we first set sail across the Russias and Siberia for the island of Aluakat in the Aleutians. The former was to join the airship's crew, the latter to remain at Aluakat. I could see that all had been carefully planned.

Electricity!

A strange, an incomprehensible force—in and of the earth, in and of interplanetary space, in and of the very universe! Electricity—call it magnetism, if you will, call it gravity or whatever else it may be—holding the very stars in their places, gripping the earth within its ninety-million-mile orbit about the sun, yet withholding the earth from the sun; staying the curious moon only two hundred and forty thousand miles from the earth itself; fastening each planet in our vast solar system in its station; holding the entire immeasurable cosmos to the fixed scheme of its tireless will. Electricity — I do not say this in jest—which, while thus gripping the universe, will also imbue the limbs of a dead frog with the spasmodic semblance of life! It grips, it fascinates, it destroys life, it cures life's ills, and it gives life. Is there any who can say that it is not life itself?

The earth itself a great magnet!

Did you know that half the navigation troubles of a ship at sea are due to this terrestrial magnetism? Did you know that even the direction in which the keel of a vessel is laid on the ways will ever after have its effect upon the navigation of that ship in its life at sea?

Lines of magnetic force run generally north and south upon or within this earth of ours, converging at the so-called magnetic poles, which only approximate the true poles—the ends of the axis on which the earth revolves. Did you know that if that ship's keel be so laid that her bow points north, then ever after will the bow of that ship be imbued with north magnetism, and the ship's compass ever after will be affected by such innate magnetism, and will have to be compensated therefor? It is strange—it is true. It may be—can we deny it who only see electricity's effect, and not its reason or its ultimate conception?—it may be life, the vital force itself.

Ah, I can see many things now that I did not see then in that eerie chamber housing our radio on Aluakat Island! Many, many things, strange, fascinating, and—yes, horrible! From the point of view of normal things, as we see them and feel them and understand them—horrible! My brother—

To the extent of our knowledge and our powers, we fought. Dr. Hemphill, the three radio experts, and I—we fought for a word from space.

A week passed, and we had none.

The Rappahannock herself carried three radio sets—two identical with our own pair, and a smaller auxiliary outfit for short distance work, to be used in conjunction with the little portables when once the great airship should have settled to the level fields of polar ice, and ground observation would be the order of the day. Was it conceivable that both of the two main sets she carried should " go out " at the same time? To us—then—it was not.

Why, then, no reply? Why, then, no report?

By code we radioed San Francisco. The secret message of disaster was relayed on to Washington. In thirty-six hours we had a reply:

" Wait."

We waited—and labored in vain.

Another month passed, and another, and another—six, with winter again in Aluakat.

The expedition of the Rappahannock had been planned and prepared in secret. The government dared not tell the public what had happened. Relief must also be sent in secret.

In the spring of 1921 the steamer returned to Aluakat. It brought supplies, sealed orders, two crated planes, and men to fly.

A year had passed since the Rappahannock had vanished into the northern blue—a year of dying hope and increasing dread.

I was to be in charge of the relief—or, rather, of the search.

The steamer took us at once to Nome. Another month passed; and when news came that the ice had broken farther north, we sailed again. We went through Bering Strait, past Cape Lisburne, Icy Cape, and Point Barrow. Beyond this, sailing eastward, we came upon a tiny harbor, south of which stretched a level tundra land. We landed, assembled the planes, and sailed in these over the Arctic Ocean, steering to the north and west, planning to cut the one hundred and seventieth meridian and to follow it as near the pole as possible. There it was that we reckoned the Rappahannock—what might yet be left of it, after the blizzards of a polar winter—would be found.

III

We sailed low, seeming to skim the ice. We discovered level fields of blinding ice; and after about four hours' steady flight to the northwestward, we landed. We built a hut of oiled silk banked with blocks of snow, as a temporary base, and stored in it part of our supplies.

Of the eight men in our party, two stayed at the base to care for the planes. The other six divided into groups of two, and, carrying condensed food and compasses, scattered north, east, and west of the hut on search—one week. We returned with shaking heads.

We took to the air again and flew northward for about the same distance — four hours' drive through clear, marrow-chilling polar sky. We discovered a landing level again; built another hut; searched to north, to west, and to east again—another week. In vain!

We would have gone on toward the north, but for our meager supplies—in particular, the shortage of fuel for the planes. We took again to the latter, sailed south in great horizontal loops, ever staring down upon the glaring fields of white—staring until, in the frigidity of the arctic air, our very eyeballs glazed with frost.

We left a message in the second hut before we left it, as already we had left one in the first. We would return, we said. Any survivors—for the Rappahannock had carried food sufficient for several months—must follow south, directly south. We would come again and would endeavor to aid them.

Turning back, we sailed about a hundred miles south of our first hut. Constantly, of course, we were on the lookout for the wreck of the Rappahannock, or for any traces of it that might remain. We took it for granted that the airship had been wrecked. Of that other and more horrible thing we then had no hint.

The imagination of man, inherited through the ages, has no conception of possibilities that former man, throughout those ages, has not experienced. The Rappahannock must have been *wrecked.* What else? Her gas might have failed for some reason. She might have landed, and no lives lost; but now, after the winter, she would no doubt be a wreck.

We landed—and it must be our last venture on the ice, for our fuel was precariously low. We built the usual hut. We searched to the west and to the east—the south we would follow until we saw the open sea.

And then it was that Sergeant Harrow and I came upon the message.

It was a dark spot on the white of the tumbled pack. I remember that the sergeant's sudden grip on my arm startled me, thrilled me with quick fear. Why fear, I cannot say; yet such, or premonition, it was.

I turned and followed his tremblingly raised directing arm.

"There's something!" The fear gripped colder. "A—a body?"

We stumbled to it over the glaring white, and stared for a moment before touching it.

It was not a body. It appeared to have been a cylinder of some sort. I can recall the trivial comparison that flashed through my mind as I gazed upon it, lying lonely and blackish brown upon the hard-packed snow. It was the size of the two-and-a-half-pound coffee tins heaped behind the cook shack back there on Aluakat; but it had been flattened, as if by a heavy blow.

Sergeant Harrow suddenly bent and picked it up. He held it toward me for closer inspection. I took it—then glanced up in quick wonder as I heard the sergeant suddenly grunt. He was holding his fur-gloved hands out before him, staring.

His palms were smutted with black.

I took my own left hand from the thing. My palm, also, was blackened. I stared into the desolate white waste that stretched about us on all sides. The sergeant caught my thought.

"No, no—that's all! There's nothing else."

I remember the quick white puffs from his lips, betraying his excitement. I dropped my eyes to the thing I held, and rubbed it with my gloved thumb.

"Charred! It's charred!" Harrow nodded without reply. "It's charred—burned—"

He nodded again, his eyes wider.

"Rubber?" he muttered, as in questioning conjecture.

I raised the thing to my nose. What odor there might once have been had long since gone.

Our minds cleared suddenly. We examined it.

Tapping it, it gave forth a hollow sound. Cutting the charred surface, we discovered that it was indeed covered with hard rubber. In one unburned space of about half an inch square there was a slightly raised rib. Both of us had dallied with things electric. The rib gave to both the same thought, simultaneously ejaculated.

"Like storage battery separators!"

We cut deeper. The outer surface peeled away in hard and brittle scales, like slate. Beneath it was another surface of hard rubber, unquestionably showing the ribbed surface of the hard rubber separators used between the lead plates of the type of storage battery carried on the Rappahannock. Our eyes met again.

We cut deeper, and the knife blade scratched on metal. Haste, then, and bright tinned surface gleamed through the black. Five minutes more, and we had the entire tin cleaned. Smashed almost flat it was, indeed, but undoubtedly one of the coffee cans which sailed with the Rappahannock on the 6th of May, 1920, more than a year before.

The ship could carry such comparative luxuries as coffee. Two weeks' cruising about the pole with six months' full supply meant nothing to its seven-hundred-foot length, its millions of cubic feet of lifting helium gas. Here was one of the tins, carefully covered with hard rubber plates welded into an air-tight, waterproof casing. It was battered out of shape, and the outer surface of the rubber was—charred!

Again I stared about me. Again Sergeant Harrow shook his head, his black eyes looking wonderingly into mine.

"Nothing — nothing else, lieutenant. Nothing—only this!" He paused for a moment, with a quick intake of breath. "And —and it's—"

Something in his voice brought my eyes again to his.

"It's what?"

His eyes dropped to the palms of his gloves.

"It's *charred!*"

"Yes," I repeated dully. "Charred the rubber is—burned. Why?"

"God knows, sir," he cried huskily. "It's charred, but there's no other—wreckage about us here. The rubber was burned, but there's nothing else about. It's smashed—"

"As if it had fallen from—"

"From a great height, lieutenant; but"—he waved his furred arm about us—"but where are the burned parts of the rest of 'em, sir? If the Rappahannock caught fire—"

"Helium gas won't burn, Harrow."

"Gasoline, then. If it caught fire—aluminium won't burn, the engines won't burn, and bo—"

He stopped suddenly, and dropped his eyes. I knew his thought then, too. Sergeant Harrow and I were too old friends in the service to mince matters, even in such a case as this. I shook my head. My brother, with the Rappahannock, had been gone a year.

"You were going to say that bones don't burn, Jim!"

His eyes burned steadily on mine.

"And yet the covering of that can was burned, and there's nothing else about."

"I'll open it!" I cried.

The tin was soft to the steel of my sheath knife, and I cut a flap in its side. I tore off one glove, regardless of the biting frost in the air, and tugged at the grayish white stuff within. It came out in fibrous chunks.

"Asbestos! They had spare stuff for the engines!"

I looked up at Harrow, and met the question in his eye.

"If it's asbestos, then it was put in here to protect what's beneath it from heat. It was deliberately packed so, as a protection from *heat*—in this frozen world. Did they—what did they—know?"

"Pull it out, man—pull it out!"

I did. Beneath what must have been, before the can was flattened in its fall, three inches of solid asbestos packing, I finally came upon an inch-thick, half-foot-long black cylinder, of the same hard rubber that had been about the container itself.

"It's a message! A message from—"

I could feel the sergeant's warm breath on my cheek. A message! My brother!

The rubber was tougher than that which had protected the main receptacle, but I cut it through and tore it apart. Within it was a tightly rolled cylinder of paper. There was handwriting on the outside of this—and with a sinking sensation, and yet one also of jubilance and pride, I recognized it. For a moment, then, the frost-white scene was black.

"From them, man? From *them?*"

I raised my eyes to Harrow.

"My brother's handwriting," I said.

Reverently I opened that message from an unknown space. Within the first wrapping was a note, addressed to me. I read it aloud:

"Dear Steve:

"I cannot see the paper now, nor my pencil, so must be brief. Our situation is awful—read and see, but for God's sake do *not* attempt to reach us here. For God's sake do *not* let the government make another trial like this. See that the families of those who sailed with us are cared for—the government owes us that; but do *not* try to help *us*. We are done. My love to all.

"I must hurry and seal this as best I can. I pray it will be found before another similar attempt is made. Good-by, Steve.

"Bill."

The sergeant and I looked into each other's eyes. Then I, whose heart was pounding savagely, stared up into the empty blue of the polar sky.

"There's something else," I said, and my voice seemed far away. "Something else—a date."

"A date?"

I nodded, and showed him. Terror leaped into his eyes. He bent down, threw up one arm, and from beneath it peered, as I had, at the empty blue vault above.

The Rappahannock had been gone for more than a year; yet the date on the message my brother had sent was July 7 of the present year—and to-day was but the 12th. It had been penciled but five days before. It had been dropped—yet the vault above was empty, clear.

And then we read what is reprinted in the following chapters.

IV

Log of the United States Rigid Dirigible Aircraft Rappahannock, Scientific Exploration Expedition in the Northern Polar Regions, 1920-1921, as condensed by Captain William R. Sheldon, Aviation Service, United States Navy, commanding.

More than a year has now elapsed since we sailed from the island of Aluakat, on May 6, 1920. In that year many strange and inexplicable things have occurred, many incidents of almost unimaginable horror have taken place. In that year we have tried with all the inventive genius within our power to communicate with the world that we know.

During the first weeks, this effort was actuated mainly by the desire for rescue, we being but human beings whom fate had imbued with the love of kind and the love of life. During the last seven months, still remaining human beings of a sort, assuredly yet holding to that love of kind and that love of life as once we knew it, our endeavor to send a message found its motive in another and now even stronger desire—to give warning.

Both types of message have been written and dispatched, but as we could see with our own eyes, they have failed to reach even the first post in the direction of their hoped-for destination. That failure has served to double our mental agony. We are in constant fear that others will follow us toward whatever horrid destiny fate has directed our own way. We have tasted of that destiny—or, at least, of the pathway leading to whatever it ultimately may be, and we shudder for those others who still are, as once we were, normal men.

This message, I cannot help but believe, will be our last. God grant that it may reach mankind before other men make such an attempt as this!

We sailed, as I have said, on May 6, 1920, secretly, in this great aircraft taken secretly, too, from Germany in the days following the world war. We were thirty-four men in all. We had been thirty-five had not my brother, who would have been my second in command, met with a mishap in which I now know that fate was kind to him.

We carried sufficient fuel to drive us halfway about the earth—double the amount we reckoned necessary to meet all the hazards of such a journey. We had food in plenty—sufficient to carry us through the following winter, did some accident bring us to earth and catch us inextricably in the polar ice. We carried duplicate sets of all modern instruments pertaining to aërial navigation. We carried duplicate sets of radio, duplicate parts of the more delicate appurtenances to our engines.

The personnel of the crew, too, was in duplicate. There were two men skilled in each of the crafts and sciences pertaining to the work of driving and navigating our ship, and to the gathering of such data as might be of scientific interest. In a word, our dirigible constituted a little world of the air, as does a ship a little world on the sea. We planned to be gone from Aluakat one month, but we were ready and equipped if that one were prolonged to six, or even to a possible eight.

As the first hours sped by, we were jubilant. All was going superlatively well. We would be the first men to navigate to the north pole through the unknown air!

Hour after hour we rushed on, following the one hundred and seventieth meridian straight for the true north. Instruments indicated each hour the passage of sixty nautical miles. The mathematics of our navigation agreed; each hour one full degree farther north. Our elation increased—we would be the first airmen at the pole!

In radio code we and Aluakat were in constant touch. The staff there—including my brother—sent us continual congratulations. I knew the bitterness that must be in his heart because he was not with us, and I was sorry for him—sorry!

A full day passed—still on we sped, hour after hour. Excitement was pounding within me. It was vibrant in the entire ship. By ten o'clock that night—it scarce can be called night—we would be there, hovering over the apex of the earth—the first men to reach it, and to view it, from the air!

The following is an extract from the ship's log, as entered by Lieutenant Harper, during the six to eight o'clock dog watch, May 7, 1920:

> 7.32—Ship's compass swinging wildly. Notified captain, navigator, and Professor Grimes. The former two went to observation bridge for bearings and altitudes of what stars could dimly be seen. The professor came to the steering room to observe the compass.
>
> 7.38—Navigator phoned down from the observation platform, requesting check of topside compass and steering compass. I gave average direction of still violently swinging compass card, and navigator directed by what average course we should hold.
>
> 7.56—Weather calm, ship riding smoothly and on level keel, yet compass card trembles violently, at times bobbing up and down spasmodically in a vertical plane. Captain, navigator, and Professor Grimes making tests in steering room. All else going well. Have notified radio room to be ready to send out eight o'clock report to Aluakat.

As you can see, at four minutes to eight on the second day of our trip we were ready to send the thirty-fifth report that all was going well. It was destined never to be dispatched.

When Lieutenant Harper first sent word to me that the steering compass was behaving strangely, I proceeded with Lieutenant Parke to the observation bridge at the forward end of the narrow running platform atop the great cigar-shaped gas bag of our dirigible. We had expected peculiar electrical phenomena in this region, and were neither greatly surprised nor unduly excited.

Professor Grimes proceeded to the steering room for observation, as you have noted. On the observation bridge Lieutenant Parke and I took the usual altitudes and azimuths of stars, and computed what average course the wheelsman was to follow, phoning down orders to that effect. There was a slight difficulty reaching Lieutenant Harper by phone, but of this we thought nothing at the time.

Following this we proceeded, through the electric-lighted interior passage within the balloon itself, to the steering room. I recall well that the lights burned yellowly, and not with their accustomed brilliance; but of this, also, we made no remark.

We arrived and found the professor jotting down notes regarding the action of the compass, and testing other electric apparatus near by. We held a short consultation, and agreed that the erratic behavior of the compass was to be expected in this latitude. We attributed the bobbing of the compass card in its bowl of alcohol and water to the passage of a terrestrial magnetic wave impulse more powerful than we had yet experienced.

Even as we watched, however, its agitation became still more spasmodic and violent. The ship maintained an even keel, yet the card to which the compass magnets are attached might have been suspended in air rather than in the liquid that normally gave it stability. This, however, gave no reason for apprehension; and when Lieutenant Harper asked permission to send the eight o'clock position report to Aluakat, I read his message and nodded.

" The thirty-fifth," I remember remarking. " Good!"

He went to the phone and signaled for the radio room. Parke, the professor, and myself bent again over the compass. It was then that I heard Harper call to one of his watch:

" Take this to the radio room. Send at once. After getting O. K. on it, tell Jenkins to come to the bridge."

I turned about. Jenkins was one of the repair electricians.

" Something gone wrong, Harper?"

He nodded—yet rather casually.

" Phone, sir. Have a man on it at once." He stepped up to me and saluted. " Eight o'clock, sir. All departments reported secure—"

And in the midst of this usual eight o'clock report to the commanding officer of the ship, he suddenly stopped, his eyes flitting to the compass.

" What's the matter?" I demanded in wonder.

" The light in the binnacle's gone out, captain."

He pointed. The binnacle hood had been replaced over the compass bowl only a moment before, and the tiny globe had shed its light over the compass card. The steersman was peering down upon it, his brows wrinkled perplexedly. He glanced up as I stepped to his side.

" It's stopped jiggling, sir."

Somewhat relieved, I nodded to Harper.

" Get Jenkins after it, too." I turned to the professor. " The wave has passed, eh, and the compass settled again?"

He also looked intently at it.

" It has, captain. It is quiet—quiet—very quiet!"

Something in his voice aroused my curiosity. I peered over his shoulder at it again. His next words were spoken in a low tone.

" Very quiet, captain — almost as if it had gone dead!"

I raised my head, listening. Some sound—some lack of sound—something different. One becomes used to a ship's hum of life. I shook myself and peered again at the compass.

" Dead?"

The card was quiet in its bowl. I found myself chuckling at the professor's voice.

" If it stays as dead as that, we'll have no more trouble with—"

I stopped short again, and stiffened, erect, listening. Something—what?

It was then that a mechanic burst into the steering room, his face rather white.

" Captain here?" He saw me, and with a quick gasp, as of relief, saluted and cried: " Report from engineer, sir. All engines stopped—stopped, captain!"

" Stopped?"

He peered into my face, seeming utterly oblivious of the others. He stepped closer and put out one hand, as if to grasp my arm. He snapped his fingers.

"Like that, captain! All at once all six of 'em just died down—and we can't get 'em started again!"

"All six engines?"

I cocked up my head once more. That was it—the sound of them was missing!

"Not all?"

"All six, sir—like that!"

I whipped about to Harper.

"Record time, position, elevation. Get a bearing below, and check our drift."

I started for the door—and a man crashed into me. Staggering back from the impact, I saw that it was the messenger whom the officer of the deck had sent to the radio room. He went red, then white.

"Excuse me, sir, I—captain, Barlow can't get Aluakat! Can't get even a spark out of his apparatus, sir—not a spark. He told me to report to you, sir."

V

EXTRACT from the Rappahannock's log, mid watch, May 8, 1920:

> All electric apparatus on board ship useless. All storage batteries dead. Magneto generators, part of cruising engines, will not give spark when motors are jacked over by hand. Captain, Professor Grimes, and all experts in electricity, working without cessation. No success at time of writing, 3.45.
>
> Weather clear, zero wind, compartments very cold, as engine exhaust heating is gone, and electric radiators useless. Ship drifting at rate of approximately one-half mile per hour in northerly direction. At time of breakdown ship was holding cruising elevation of two thousand feet. This has increased to three thousand four hundred in the last eight hours—

In brief, this covered our situation. Electricity was vital to the ship, and it had failed in every method of generation. Spare storage batteries, filled with new solution, failed. A magneto generator, spare for the engines, was geared up and a hand crank devised. It also failed to generate a spark. This was a last test, almost a last resort.

Yet, even under such disappointment, there was no general sense of apprehension over the ship. Temporarily, our means of developing electric power had failed—just that and nothing more.

In a consultation of our experts, Professor Grimes declared that the situation must be caused by our passage through some terrestrial magnetic wave peculiar to the hitherto unexplored altitudes in the polar regions. Either that, or some such wave was even now passing through the atmosphere about us. He cited the aurora borealis as a well known electrical phenomenon of the polar regions that seems to come and go almost with direction or will.

He waved his hand in conclusion.

"A passing obstacle," he declared. "An hour more, perhaps a day, a week—and all will be well again."

I recall Lieutenant Parke staring soberly through the closed port, moistening his lips and nodding.

"A week—"

Yet, as I say, we felt that the thing would pass. In general, we saw no cause for fear.

The cold was intense, of course, and we had risen some fourteen hundred feet in altitude without known cause; but neither of these two developments merited special remark then. I set them down here for reasons that will be appreciated later.

Our slight drift to northward, too, gave little cause for comment. When the engines failed, we were proceeding at the rate of sixty miles an hour. The atmosphere was absolutely motionless, and a certain residuum of our momentum would account for the forward drift.

Despite failure thus far, we continued our efforts. Above all, we desired to communicate with Aluakat. This was not disaster, and we wished the minds of those left behind to be at peace.

Extract from ship's log, afternoon watch, May 15, 1920:

> Ship at rest at an altitude of 14,627 feet. Approximate position, 169° west longitude, 96° north latitude, indicating a drift to south and east of position when engines failed, and a rise in altitude of 12,627 feet. Electrical experts working in shifts to generate current. Cold not so intense. Atmosphere quiet—zero wind. Crew cheerful. Plenty of food. General spirit of optimism.

A week since the last extract, you see, and still we had courage and hope.

One reason for this lay, I think, in the fact that the men chosen from the hardy group that fetched the Rappahannock across the northern barrens of the Asiatic continent before we made our first landing in Aluakat were themselves the very hardiest. All fetched to that hidden Aleutian harborage were as superlatively qualified physically for such an undertaking as were they superlatively mentally equipped; and for the polar cruise itself we chose the best of them all.

Strong blood and clear thinking ever be-get the ability to endure those hardships that are far worse than mere physical ones—hardships of the spirit. We were, to a man, not only hopeful but confident—and filled, too, with the zest of adventure in the unknown.

Professor Grimes, of us all, might have been called a slight man. In age he led the oldest of us by twenty years. He was thin to the point of meagerness. He was gray. Yet, give him a mental task to perform, and the driving force of his gigantic will was backed by a body that seemed not to know fatigue. During the first two days of our plight he did not sleep for forty-eight hours. He superintended every technical job and continually suggested new ones.

Lieutenant Parke, my mate and navigator, was the professor's physical opposite. Topping my own lean six feet by two full inches, he was pink-skinned, torsoed like a bull, eyed like a hawk, nosed like a Roman emperor. During the war he had downed eight German planes in single-handed duels of the air, and he had invented a stabilizing device for heavier-than-air machines that meant a new era in aërial navigation; yet he could not stand continuous effort as could Professor Grimes.

I mention only these two at this moment. I might add two others who have been with me almost to the last.

One was Barlow, chief radio electrician, who had been on watch when first we failed to signal Aluakat. He was a heavy-set man with black eyes deep under low-drawn and still blacker brows, swarthy to the point of a desert dweller, wide jawed as a prize fighter. He was keen for experiment, sure in analysis of things pertaining to his craft, steady, unexcitable, indomitable—and, perhaps strangely, as kind and as true as a Lincoln.

The other was Leclerc, photographer of the expedition. Again an opposite—ratlike, hunch-shouldered, with dull hair the color of a rat, and a thin yellow face. His slightly bulbous washed blue eyes seemed ever on the watch, yet ever unseeing. He always wore stained clothing, and he had stained finger nails which, when not in his dark room or aiming a camera, he constantly chewed.

Leclerc was enthusiastic, as an artist should be, and cynical of all things but his craft. He supported a crippled father, a present wife, a divorced wife, and her three children, by the earnings of his camera. A mean man, by all appearances — yet we loved him, for beneath the crust was something else.

"I am seek of doing nozzing on t'ees damn sheep, captain," he said to me the first day. "Put me to work!"

These are but examples of our human material. As the log says, there was no doubt about it—"general spirit of optimism." But one thing gave us cause for serious apprehension—our steadily increasing altitude.

According to the manufacturers, the Z 397, loaded to capacity, as it had been when we left Aluakat, could reach a maximum elevation above sea level of twelve thousand feet. On this, the eighth day, we had nearly three thousand feet above this maximum, and still were slowly rising. This, any more than the disturbance of our electric plants, we could not understand.

The indefatigable professor suggested that it might be caused by currents of air slowly circulating about the poles—the axis of the earth—and lifting us with them.

Parke's eagle nose lifted. He objected, on the ground that we had made but little horizontal drift—perhaps, in all, twelve miles.

The professor returned that these currents might simply exercise a vertical force upon our cigar-shaped balloon, or that our elevating rudders might act like the stretched wings of a condor, so that, still hovering over approximately the same spot on the surface of the earth below, we were gradually lifted to greater heights.

We nodded vaguely at this, I know. The essential thing was to get the engines going; then we might descend as we willed.

Extract from Rappahannock's log, June 1, 1920:

> Ship at an altitude of 26,890 feet—still rising. Position, determined by star sight, approximately as of 8 P.M. of May 7, 1920. Daily attempts to bring electrical equipment to function still unsuccessful. Food in plenty. Water on diminishing rations. Helpful spirit among personnel, but hope of proceeding to the pole rapidly going.

Terse comments, these, but pointed in their brevity.

Some of us still clung to hope, but it was to a dim hope, and a fast vanishing one.

Three weeks passed, and our situation was at last openly admitted to be precarious. Whatever was the phenomenon that had rendered useless all electric apparatus on board the ship, it had not passed, as Professor Grimes declared it must, and as we all thought it would. We were helpless. We were sailors of the air marooned at a high altitude, beyond all present aid from mankind on the earth below.

Does this sound incredible to your ears, knowing how easy it is for a balloonist to reach the ground beneath? As easy, surely, as for plummet to fall when cast from on high!

We had worked hard. We had put all the mental genius at our command to the task—and further attempt in one direction, at least, we dared not hazard.

At the end of the second week we began to cast about, not so much now to resuscitate our dormant motive power, as to reach the dim white surface beneath us that we knew to be the earth. To this end we opened the valves and emptied six of the thirty separate balloon compartments of their contents—the precious lifting element, the helium gas.

Our altitude at this time was somewhat over twenty thousand feet, and under normal conditions we should have dropped quickly to the ten-thousand-foot level and then sunk slowly to the surface of the earth. We did, however, no such thing. If anything occurred, it was the opposite. We continued slowly *to rise*.

Our instruments showed the atmosphere at this level to be highly rarefied, and far less dense than that of the twelve-thousand-foot level—the maximum elevation to which the ship, according to its designers' theory, could reach with all its gas compartments inflated, and with its storage spaces, living quarters, and fuel tanks loaded to maximum carrying capacity. With one-fifth of the lifting element released, and still under practically maximum load, we continued to ascend.

The suggestion that we should open more helium compartments we dared not adopt. We had released too much gas as it was, declared Professor Grimes.

We had given up the theory of sustaining air currents. There was something, the professor stoutly held, in the magnetic properties of the atmosphere, that was preventing descent, as it had already neutralized our electric generation. We all hoped, he repeated, that this condition was but temporary.

"Suppose we release more helium," he cried, waving one thin hand, as he rumpled his scanty gray locks with the other. "Suppose we release more of the gas which under normal conditions keeps us in the air. Then suppose this strange condition ceases. What then?"

Lieutenant Parke's gray eyes glittered. He projected one fur-mitted hand, the thumb stiffly pointed down.

"The ice," he said.

The professor nodded with almost savage certainty.

"We would fall like a rock!"

We dared not risk further release of helium—dared not while there was the slightest gleam of hope remaining. If we had—ah, perhaps the swift rush downward and the final quick death leaping up with the earth below us had been better! But of that, who then could know? Besides, as I have said, we still retained some hope, were it ever so slight.

We gave up the idea of sinking earthward, and renewed our attempts to generate electricity, that we might go forward. Still in vain!

Food was plentiful; and despite the chill in this highly rarefied polar atmosphere, we developed no cases of frostbite. We found furs a necessity, yes; but when toiling with our instruments and machinery, no harm came to bare hands. And we discovered more and more that we needed but little food to retain our bodily strength, to maintain our bodily heat at normal.

Something high-spirited, too, there seemed to be in the quality of the very air we breathed. We were alert, almost intensely so, in mind and body. We did not tire easily. We slept but little, yet awoke mightily refreshed.

At the time we attributed this condition to the effect of our situation—I mean not the physical one, but the mental—upon our nervous systems. Now, of course, we know differently—or think we know differently. I believe, indeed, that had we then known what speedily was to develop, even the most iron-willed of our marooned group would have rushed for the valves and emptied out the last vestige of helium, or, that failing, would have cast himself over the side.

VI

Extract from log of the Rappahannock, October 6, 1920, forenoon watch, as entered by Lieutenant Harper:

> Conditions as before. Still slowly rising—altitude 59,500 feet, approximated. At 10.40 Davis,

ship's cook, second class, reported to me that some one was playing tricks on him. When questioned, his replies were vague. His fear undoubtedly was not. He declared that if such action on part of his mates was continued he would jump off the ship.

I reported at once to the captain. Davis promised to go to him before taking such final action, and all hands declared they played no tricks. We wonder if this is a sign of coming mental deterioration. Davis still insists that his shipmates had been hoaxing him.

Five months have passed since we started from Aluakat, happy and enthusiastic and confident of speedy success. Five months! And before us, perhaps God only knows—an eternity.

We are practically motionless up here as far as horizontal progress is concerned; but we rise steadily, as if our ship is slowly being pushed upward by some persistent and pitiless satanic spirit. As I put down these notes, the Rappahannock is lying on an even keel, without sense of motion, at the undreamed altitude of sixty thousand feet above the surface of the earth — or nearly *twelve miles!*

From this point on my comments upon extracts from the log are taken verbatim from my private diary written the same day or that following. My purpose in sending this message to men on earth being twofold—simple relation of our situation, and also a warning against any similar attempt to reach the pole through the higher altitudes—I believe this method of procedure will have the stronger deterrent effect that I with all my heart desire.

It was at this date, too, that the real horror of our predicament began rapidly to develop.

Twelve miles—and so alone, so utterly beyond all help or remedy! In the last two months we have not seen the earth. The white fields below us have merged into nothingness with the dim horizon itself, and we are but the insignificant center of a vast pale blue sphere.

The sun is daily showing its pale disk lower and lower, and it is only by sight of it, and of the paler stars above us, that we know that our keel is still held earthward by whatever residual force of gravity is yet acting upon it. The sun and the few stars seem nearer to us than the earth itself. We sometimes start at discovering ourselves staring, almost in mental vacuum, out upon them.

The moon, nearest of all other cosmic bodies to the earth we once knew, is our greatest friend. We know every cratered lineament of Luna's face as we never knew it before. Sight of her rising to the south and east—we know it must be south and east, though our compasses are as worthless as on that first day months ago—is all, I imagine, that keeps us sane, paradoxical though it may seem.

By day we are the tiny center of a vast sphere, stretching into pale blue infinities of space up, down, to right, to left, to the front, to the rear. The Rappahannock is alone in this space, and we, her crew, are marooned with her.

There is no wind. There is but little atmosphere at all at this height.

By all accepted ideas, we should long ago have been dead from lack of oxygen, we should have been frozen stiff with cold. Long since, too, should we have died in torment from lack of water; yet, strangely, we live. Not only do we live, but we still retain our strength and bodily comfort.

For a month now no water has passed my lips; yet to-day, physically, I feel no less fit than when last I drank. In all truth, I feel better than ever I felt before in my life on earth. Every fiber of me, day and night—we do not sleep now, seeming not to require it, though God knows the boon of unconsciousness would be welcomed with all our hearts—every fiber, I say, thrills with an almost damnable sense of exhilaration.

I feel no lack of air, I feel nothing of the cold that our thermometers, long since at their minimum level, persistently point out to be with us. I do not feel the need of water, or even of food. Bodily, I seem in the prime of health and strength and endurance—damnably so; and it is thus with every other man on the ship, even Professor Grimes.

Mentally—there may be a difference.

Five months have elapsed since we sailed from Aluakat on the 6th of May. The last four have been passed in the dead monotony of hopelessness.

For some time we dropped daily a small parachute suspending messages. We have cause, now, to doubt whether they ever fell to earth.

We developed a daily routine. We have kept up, simply for lack of real action, our regular schedule of watches, but with this change — each watch has been cut down from four hours to two. This was done in order to break the monotony of our ceaseless awakeness, if I may use the word. Our several departments have been consolidated into three—navigation, engineering, and scientific.

In the first group are Lieutenants Harper, Parke, Leavitt, and myself, with the three quartermasters. In each two-hour watch we visit the steering room and the observation platform atop the ship, where we take what astronomical sights we may. Then we take a course throughout the entire ship and back to the steering room again, where we await relief.

In the engineering department are Lieutenant Bristow, the engineer, his assistant, Warrant Machinist Willis — expert in the new Hermaphrodite Diesel engines—and the twelve machinists' mates, who were formerly assigned in pairs to each of the six motor units.

In the scientific group, headed by Professor Grimes, are the radio experts, the four electricians; Leclerc, the photographer; Mr. Jones, the meteorologist, and Davis, the cook.

The three petty officers, who complete our total personnel of thirty-four, are held as a relief and emergency group. It is their calling to duty here and there on the ship that most helps us of the navigation department to pass the time and break the dull monotony of trying to do something when there is nothing to do.

The cook, at his own request—and because, too, navy cooks are at best temperamental—was placed with the scientists, as you may note. As far as cooking was concerned, there was practically nothing for him to do.

Thus we lived—still live, if living it can be called. At regular intervals, between our watches, we lie down—from habit, and because we have strictly enforced the rule; for we finally have come, as I said, to the point where we cannot embrace, and seem not to require the divine dispensation of sleep.

Every watch each engine is jacked over two complete revolutions, all oil drips and grease cups are examined, all bright work on exposed parts is rubbed down. During each watch the scientific department attempts to restore current, attempts to start the radio. Each change of watch, we have hitherto hoped, would bring the hoped-for release from this strange condition; but as I have said, though bodily alert and well, we have suffered a mental change. Hope has fled!

Perhaps it was this that first affected the cook, Davis. Perhaps he had already been touched by—something, we know not yet what, only believing that it is something hitherto unknown to normal men in normal environments.

As stated in the log, he came to Lieutenant Harper complaining that some one was playing tricks on him. This happened today, during the second morning watch.

His anger was so genuine, his sense of outrage so intense, that Harper at once sent him to me in my quarters abaft the steering room. I asked him in what way he had been tricked. He stared about him for a moment, as if he feared another presence in the narrow space; then he turned to me, wide-eyed. Hesitatingly he took a pad of paper and a pencil from my desk, and wrote:

"Behind my back, sir. Touching me on the cheek, like—on the ear, maybe. When I turns back, they're at work again. It ain't right, captain, playing tricks like that when you're up here this way. It ain't right, sir!"

"Did you ask them if they had touched you?" I replied, also penciling my words on the pad of paper.

"I did, sir. They denies it; but something touched me, and they was the only men about."

"How far away from you were they when you felt the touch?"

"About five feet."

"Did you turn at once?"

"At first I just kind of brushed it away, sir; but after that I got mad and turned on them. They was back at work again—like that!"

He returned the pad and snapped his fingers.

You wonder, perhaps, why we used paper and pencil in talking to one another thus. You forget our altitude — all but sixty thousand feet. At that height there is barely enough air to carry sound.

A month ago we could hear only by placing the mouth to the ear, and literally yelling; and this became not only disagreeable, but irksome. Now all sound has ceased. Fortunately, we have plenty of note paper with us, not only for navigational purposes, but for scientific notes. Each group chief constantly carries a pad and pencil.

I examined Davis's face gravely, but with a sort of apprehensive curiosity. Was our extraordinary manner of life at last beginning to tell? Was this the first sign of madness?

I decided that it was not. The man's eyes, though holding anger, showed nothing of mental decay. He had probably been hoaxed by his thoughtless mates. It must stop.

I so assured him, and set out to inform the rest of the crew that no practical jokes might be indulged in. The practice would surely lead to danger.

It was later that Lieutenant Bristow, the engineer, came to me.

"I talked to the group who were working with Davis, captain, and they still deny having touched him. They seemed surprised that I doubted them. They said that as far as they were concerned, they'd throw overboard any man who tried practical jokes up here. It looks to me as if Davis had been dreaming."

I nodded, but the incident set me to thinking.

When Davis came again later in the afternoon, with a similar complaint, I held him there and called in Professor Grimes. The professor questioned him; and after getting his promise to do nothing rash, I sent him away.

Then I turned to Professor Grimes.

One week before, as Parke and I were on the observation platform, I had been suddenly startled by my companion's quick, tight grip on my arm. His lips moved, and he pointed down the long, narrow runway toward the stern. Then I felt a tingling run over my body.

Perhaps two hundred feet away, and slowly rolling toward us, was a spherical luminous object about the size of a basket ball. In the dim light it was bluish white, not unlike the phosphorescence of a tropic sea.

It rolled, as I say, very slowly in our direction, and it left in its wake a trail of the same living hue, which flickered and wavered almost as might flame. As it neared us, we could see that it was not perfectly round itself, but that its surface was in wraithlike motion, and tongued with flamelike stuff of the same bluish radiance.

We awaited its approach stiffly—I, for my part, in some trepidation. I guessed what it was, but feared it. Then, when almost upon us, as if it had suddenly turned fluid, it flattened upon the runway, pooled there for a full minute, as it spread to the edge of the narrow foot strips, hesitated, and then flowed with great deliberation over upon the skin of the ship—and vanished.

Parke turned to me, and his lips formed the word:

"Electricity!"

I nodded.

I did not feel entirely comfortable. The quiet about the ship has been so complete during the last months—so intense, as it were; and I did not fancy having things like that appear out of the quiet so entirely unheralded. It was uncanny — damnably uncanny.

I mentioned this now to Professor Grimes. He nodded, and inquired—speaking to me with pad and pencil:

"Something like that touched Davis?"

I wrote two words, ending with a question mark:

"And—unseen?"

The professor's eyes raised to mine at that. Then he nodded again.

"We are strangely situated, and it would be unprecedented. The study of electricity is yet in its infancy. We know a few things it can do, but we do not yet know what it is or why it does them. What we do know of electricity applies only to normal conditions on our normal earth. We are some twelve miles above that normal—six miles higher than man has heretofore reached. We are as much explorers in an unknown world as was Livingstone in Africa. We are in a part of the polar region that no man has yet visited, and twelve miles above that region. Natural electrical phenomena seem peculiarly at their maximum in the polar regions known to man. Who knows what strange manifestations of this unknown force we may not meet with up here? Something touched Davis. He could not see what it was. No other man saw what it was. You and Parke witnessed a fluid ball of electricity the other day—saw it. Who can say but that Davis was touched by something akin to it, and yet invisible?"

We left the matter thus; but I, at least, was wondering.

Sixty thousand feet above the pole in an aircraft which, following every known law of nature, should long since have drifted down to the earth! In an aircraft supported by—as far as we could see—nothing; living without food, without water, without sleep, yet entirely comfortable in body, extremely alert in both body and mind! High in space, in a temperature below anything that our spirit thermometers could measure, yet going about our duties in ordinary uniforms and nothing else! Atmosphere so lacking in the stuff we breathe that it cannot carry sound—and yet suffering no bodily disquiet thereby!

We live, as the Rappahannock is supported, on what? Heaven only knows.

And our destination—our end? Who knows?

VII

Extract from the Rappahannock's log, October 10, 1920, as written by Lieutenant Parke:

> Altitude sixty thousand feet, approximated. Situation unchanged. Electrical phenomena on increase. Professor Grimes and others studying new manifestations.

The peculiar force about us, which must be sustaining us in this almost infinitely thin atmosphere, has indeed been showing itself in a strange way. The ship, even in the twilight of our shortening days, is now run and streaked with fluid electricity; and this not simply now and then, but continuously. Each protruding part, the struts supporting the engine compartments, the thin-bladed vertical and horizontal rudders, the topside runway, the slightly raised parallels of our seven-hundred-foot balloon, where the fabric is drawn tightly against the aluminium framework—all, all, are running with living blue white flame.

On the observation platform, this morning, I myself inadvertently dropped my hand to the rail. I snatched it away quickly; then, instantly realizing that I had come to no harm, I reached out and touched the flickering, phosphorescent lambency of it. I could not feel it. I spread my hand and gripped the rail. The stuff banked up on either side, then flowed over my hand. I could not feel it. It left no impression upon the skin.

Parke, watching, did the same. Then his eyes fixed upon mine, mutely questioning.

The men, accustomed to the thing now, work in utter disregard of it. The engines, when the tarpaulins are taken off each watch—you see how rigid is our routine, to break the dread and soundless monotony of our existence up here—slowly become covered with the fluid stuff. A hammer held in the open air for a full minute becomes thickly coated with it.

It is strange to see one of the engineers seize from the deck a thing of bluish flame in the shape of a jacking bar—seize it without aversion or comment; and then to see his hand, as the stuff finds its course over the handle impeded by his grip, quickly also flame and glow with it. Strange, indeed—and yet, so far as we can see, it does no harm.

Parke and I had difficulty, during our watches, in taking sights atop the ship. No sooner was the sextant out of its case than it also ran with the phosphorescent blue. It was only by calling a quartermaster to stand by and continually flick the instrument with a bit of gauze that I could catch the faint reflection of a star. Heaven only knows if that can be done at all a week from to-day!

We believe now that the reason for the failure of our storage batteries and other means of generating electricity is that the polar atmosphere about us is so overpoweringly surcharged with electricity itself that their own mean effort is entirely *numbed*—not *neutralized,* but simply overwhelmed, made futile, *numbed.* We have long since come to the conclusion that the situation is not a passing one.

We need no food, because the cellular breakdown and renewal of flesh and bone is effectually stopped, our bodies having become impregnated with electricity in their every atom. We need no air—though through inherent habit our lungs still perform the function of breathing—because our blood now carries no waste matter that requires oxygen to burn up. In a word, metabolism has ceased within our bodies. Cell life continues—fed and sustained and withheld from natural deterioration by the electricity that has literally been *soaking* into us during the last six months.

We are physically cleansed. We live—tremendously. Our bodies are held thus in a sort of *status quo,* but alive with the all-powerful force of which man as yet knows so little.

Professor Grimes, in consultation yesterday, looked at me gravely at the end of our discussion, then wrote one sentence—in form, a question:

"Does it mean that life is electricity—and electricity, *life?*"

Neither nodding nor shaking my head, all that I could do was to stare gravely back in return.

Another thing occurred to-day that

brings us again to the hopelessness of our position.

We have been dropping parachutes weekly, having discontinued the daily attempt to send messages earthward because of shortage of materials. This morning we made another effort, using the colored bunting of some of the last of our signal flags for the parachute itself. To this we attached the message, having sealed it in a small tin.

We dropped it overboard. It fell like a plummet, as we had seen others do before, for lack of sustaining air. We watched it as it dropped away, leaning over the open cockpit of the engine compartment, whence we let it fall.

Recall now that the cold is intense, though we do not feel it—more than one hundred and fifty-six degrees below zero centigrade, at which point our means of measuring temperature all fail. Recall, also, that in this rarefied atmosphere there can be but very little friction upon the surface of even a rapidly falling body.

Imagine our consternation, then, at seeing the parachute, swiftly descending through space toward the earth that we cannot see, suddenly begin to glitter like a star, then literally burst into a thousand tiny sparkling bits—and vanish.

Parke, the two enginemen in the compartment, and I looked at one another, whiter-faced than was now natural up here. Then, with a finger at my lip, I shook my head to the machinists and took Parke by the arm.

In my own stateroom Professor Grimes heard our story. He nodded grimly.

" Gathered more electricity in its rush downward than the fabric could stand. Literally, it blew up. Simple answer, but to what other cause can we attribute it?"

October 15, 1920.—I was sitting at my desk to-day, reading, when I felt a light touch on my shoulder. I looked up and about. There was no one there.

Thinking nothing of it, I returned to my book. Shortly again came the touch. I turned again—no one there. I leaped to my feet. Davis had been thus touched. I stared about me, feeling my heart pound.

Then I laughed at my fears, put the book down on the desk, locked the stateroom door, and methodically examined every nook and cranny of the room. No living thing save myself was in it.

I closed the two ports, ascertained again that my door was secure, and sat me down. Shortly I became absorbed in my book again—a providential dispensation, this ability to become part of another man's story, to forget the present! Then came another light touch, this time upon my right cheek.

Recoiling within myself, I held steady. The touch came again, more boldly than before, it seemed to me, though perhaps it was only that my senses were more tensely alert.

Still I gripped myself. With all my will I kept my hands upon the book, my eyes upon the page I but vaguely saw.

Again the touch—this time almost concretely. I flashed my hand up. Nothing!

I stared at my hand. There was naught of the bluish fluid stuff I thought I would see upon it. I leaped up, and examined my cheek in the little mirror on the opposite bulkhead. There was nothing of the stuff on it.

I began to feel strongly the sense of uncanniness that must have been Davis's some days ago. I called Grimes to my room, and told him. To my astonishment he wrote:

" I felt it, too—yesterday—twice."

I repeated to him the experience Parke and I had had with the sphere of stuff rolling toward us on the runway above the balloon envelope. He shook his head.

" I saw nothing when the touch came."

" Nor did I."

" The second touch seemed—if I may use the word—bolder," he wrote.

" In my case, also."

" Some hitherto unmanifested phase of electricity—"

He paused with his pencil as I added:

" What next?"

He shook his head.

Extract from log of the Rappahannock, November 3, 1920, as entered by Lieutenant Leavitt:

> Position probably as before—astronomical observations impossible, due to presence of fluid electricity. Elevation practically the same—60,300, approximated.
>
> 3.47—Davis, ship's cook, first class, threw himself overboard. Phenomena continue.

Sufficient for the logged account of the day's happenings, but hardly a full explanation of how poor Davis came to be a suicide, and quite insufficient to tell of the real horror of his end.

It has been a full day—too full.

At about nine o'clock of the first morning watch, Leclerc, the little photographer, came to me. His face was very grave, his beady eyes wide open for the first time I have ever seen them so. I rose at once. I knew him to be an excitable person, and his manner of approach as if walking on eggs, as well as the appearance of his eyes, bade me be ready.

" Captain," he wrote, " will you come to my dark room for a moment?"

I followed without a word.

He closed the door behind me, and locked it. He went to the ports, and screwed down their sheet aluminium blinders; then he turned to me.

It was the first time for four months or more that I had been in the absolute dark. I gasped. The room was black, I say, and yet before me I could see Leclerc. I could see his face, his head. Below and to his left I could see one hand still upon the shelf at his side, below and to his right I could see the other hand hanging by his side.

I could see them, I say. They glowed as from within with a luminosity of the same phosphorescent blue-white of the fluid electricity we daily behold about the outstanding features of the ship. I could see his every facial blemish, his small, dark eyes, his rat-colored hair, the discoloration of his bitten finger nails. One and all they glowed, as if impregnated with it — with that blue-white stuff.

Uncanny? I recalled what had occurred in my stateroom three weeks before, when I had first felt the touch upon my cheek, and I shivered.

The photographer's right hand raised and pointed. I looked down—and seized my own right hand with the left. Both glowed in the same way. I pointed to my face, and the glowing head of Leclerc nodded, his eyes fixed gravely upon mine.

Motioning him to wait, I opened the door and examined my hand. In the twilight outside I appeared as usual.

I sought out the professor, and fetched him to the dark room. He, too, glowed in every exposed part.

I tore off my tunic, my shirt. Not only the parts of my body ordinarily exposed to the atmosphere were affected, but even those hidden. Our very bodies are saturated with electricity. No wonder we are so alert, so *alive!*

We left the room, the professor and I, and went to my own.

" We should have suspected this," I wrote.

He nodded.

" It keeps us alive. It only requires darkness to be seen," he returned.

" What is the end?" I put to him, as I had done many days before.

Again he shook his head.

It was but an hour after this episode that a man came to me, running.

" Davis—gone crazy, sir! He's struggling to—"

I dashed after the man. I felt upon face and hands a peculiar tingling which I did not then particularly note.

In one of the engine compartments—the middle one on the starboard side—was a confused and writhing heap of men. I could see their mouths open, could see their lips snarl curses, but I could hear nothing of either voices or scuffling.

I cried to them to stop, not hearing my own voice. One of them, Warrant Machinist Willis, flashed me a glance. I could almost read his words:

" He wants to jump overboard!"

Then I recognized Davis as his face showed from the mass of them. He, too, flashed me a look—a glare of horror and of appeal. His lips moved mutely:

" I can't—I can't stand it—I can't—"

Again I ordered them to cease, and ordered Davis to quit his struggling. The man who had come for me leaped in upon Davis as the cook renewed his efforts to get away; but the madman seemed endowed with almost superhuman strength. It took the five of us to hold him, to bring him to his feet.

At last he stood before me, held by two men on each side. I jerked out my pad and pencil.

" We are your friends, Davis. What is the trouble?"

He began to speak, his eyes fixed hollowly on mine. I saw that he was half mad with horror. I read in his eyes a pleading for release from that horror. Bidding the men release one of his hands, I gave him the pencil and held the pad, that he might write.

" I've got to quit, sir. I can't stand them—I can't. All the time touching me, captain. Before I go crazy—I've got to quit! My other hand, sir—look at it, look at it!"

He made a convulsive effort with his left hand, and the men, thinking he was making another attempt to break away, gripped him hard. I stared down at the hand, and felt my heart give a savage jolt within me.

The two men on his left held him by shoulders, arm, and wrist; but the hand, the left hand itself, I could hardly see. It was almost transparent. At the wrist I could make out, through Davis's flesh, two of the fingers, shadowlike, of the hand of the man who was gripping it.

The scene in Leclerc's dark room was fresh upon me. I know, too, that again I lifted my own hands and stared dumbly upon them. Inwardly I gave a sigh of relief, for they appeared as usual; but Davis's—the finger tips were gone, utterly. The remaining joints were but vaguely apparent. The palm was only an outlined shadow against the dark of his uniform.

I looked into his eyes, and read again the plea for release.

The four men holding him, no doubt following my first stare, suddenly fell back, with consternation and sudden terror on their faces.

Instantly Davis had whipped away. Before a single one of us realized his intention, he had put that awful translucent hand upon the blue running rail, and had vaulted over into space!

For a moment we froze there. Then, as one, we jumped to the rail.

Turning over and over pathetically as he fell, Davis was swiftly becoming a little black thing in the pale blue space beneath us. I watched him, dry-lipped, as if hypnotized. In the back of my mind something was saying:

"Wait! Wait! Wait!"

I did—we did. He was but a tiny dark speck now.

"Wait! Wait!"

Only an atom—falling, falling away—a soul drowned in horror—

Came a sudden tiny flash, a crystal glitter of showering particles against the distant blue; and Davis, like the parachute, had vanished.

VIII

Extract from log of the Rappahannock, second afternoon watch, December 19, 1920, entered by Lieutenant Leavitt:

> Situation as before. Altitude, 63,500 feet, approximated. Corresponding position on earth's surface continues indeterminate. Personnel physically well, otherwise in continual state of hopelessness and suspense. Driggs, machinist's mate, first class, threw himself overboard at 4.47—the sixth man to do so thus far. Claimed to have seen things.

More terse comment upon the day's happenings, you see!

During the last two months, then, we have lost a total of six men. Each claimed to have been touched by unseen things. One, the day before he became a suicide, swore that he had been struck a hard blow. Driggs himself, only this morning, believed that he had heard a voice and then felt a heavy impact, as of a dense but invisible body. He declared then and there to me that if it occurred again, he would follow the others.

"I don't care, captain, if it does mean that I'll be blown to bits. That's quick death, anyway, and better than falling twelve miles to earth, thinking about when I'd strike, and yelling because I'd changed my mind about wanting to die!"

No, he did not write this with the vestige of a smile, nor did it strike me at all in the way of humor. Hardly!

"If it happens again," he went on, "I'll follow the others!" He hesitated for a moment, his eyes holding mine in mute question. Then he bent to the pad again. "You won't try to stop me, captain?"

What was I to say to that?

Surely we are lost to mankind and deserted by God; and Driggs sought only peace—peace. I shook my head slowly. His face lit, and he drew a deep breath.

"Thank you, captain," he wrote.

And before five hours had elapsed, his comrades, peering down over the rail in hypnotic fascination, saw him disintegrate into a thousand flashing atoms that vanished in the deepening blue of the void beneath and about us.

I do not blame him, nor does my conscience cry against me for not attempting to prevent him from carrying out his intention. In a way, I think that he, and the others, have done well. Men they were born, and they wanted to die as men. Surely a manly desire, a completely human one! No—there can be no blame.

Many things have happened since my last writing in this journal.

The arctic winter is upon us. Far below there must be blizzard, whooping yell of wind, marrow-freezing chill, cloud upon cloud of dense and blinding snow. Here there is still intense elemental peace.

We peer over the side—there is naught below us, nor about us, save an infinity of dark blue space. We know what must be below only because our log shows it to be December, and because now the sun does not rise above the southern horizon. I use the term " horizon " merely relatively, for we cannot see a horizon line, only a cessation of the stars.

The entire ship is now aglow, but daily, against the darkness of the void about us, it is becoming more palely so. That may sound paradoxical; but read on.

A month ago, and more than a month after Davis showed us his horrid transparent hand, the great shape of the balloon above our living compartments became alive with flickering phosphorescent flame. Our living and work compartments themselves were aglow in every part. Leclerc's dark room was no longer dark. Entering it, we merely passed into a cubicle whose walls were running with the fluid electricity. Inside it or out, every man of us was aglow with the same horrid hue.

We live in a partial darkness now, with the sun making summer far to the south. In the darkness we men march about our duties with all the semblance of ghosts—ghosts on a ghostly ship, on a ghostly, soundless ship, hanging in a soundless and seemingly infinite space.

Our routine itself has become almost ghostly to me. The others tell me that it is so to them, too. We still feel physically alert—yes, but about our duties we have come to plod. The zest inspired by hope has gone. The adventure of it, the spell of the unknown, has lost completely its savor. We are horribly tired of our physical alertness. We are rapidly tiring of our mental alertness.

Did you ever think what it must mean never to cease consciously to think? Then pity us! Minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, and the days running into weeks, the weeks into months, without the blessed hiatus of sleep—we are alert in body and in mind. Blame Davis? Blame Driggs? No!

December 22, 1920.—To-day something new occurred, and because of it I have taken to this journal once more. We know not what it means. We know not to what it may lead. It only happened, as other things have happened. On earth we heard of such things—more often than not we scoffed. There were many things we then deemed to be mere figments of the imagination of deluded or mentally deranged people.

But this—there are other witnesses than I—this actually happened.

To help kill the monotony, my brother officers and I have been for some time engaged in the attempt to develop a new method of fixing position by sun and star sight—a system that will be as effective as that of Marc St. Hilaire, and yet vastly simpler in its application.

We were chosen for this expedition—I say it in all modesty; it is simply the fact—because we were mentally equipped above the average of our fellows. Here we find even greater mental celerity. The electric atmosphere has speeded and clarified our ratiocinative processes, we verily believe, beyond the experience of men living in the denser and less highly sensitized atmosphere closer to the surface of the earth. We find our minds reaching out to conclusions even before we perceive the logical pathway leading to those conclusions.

We have not entirely understood this peculiarity of our brain's newer functioning. We simply accept the fact. Hence our ambition along navigational lines.

I was in my room this afternoon, engaged on this work. I had almost come to a conclusion, but for some reason, despite what I have just said, I could not grasp it. It was there before me. My mind encompassed it, and yet did not make full contact with it.

It was as if my brain was a magnetized circle, and the conclusion a tiny ball, also magnetized, and yet of opposite polarity. I held it, and yet it stood away.

Perhaps for half an hour I pondered thus. Then I had a feeling that some one was at my door, or approaching it. We do not knock now, of course, for there is no sound. I arose and opened the door.

Parke was standing outside, his hand outstretched as if he had reached for the knob. He looked at me expectantly.

" Here I am, captain," his lips said.

I stared at him abstractedly for a moment, my mind still filled with the problem. Then I nodded him in, to a chair, and we both sat down.

For a moment I still groped for my conclusion. Then, awakening, I turned to him.

"What has happened now, Parke?" I wrote.

He looked at me.

"Nothing, captain; but you sent for me, did you not?"

I stared back at him.

"No! I have been engaged in this thing."

I indicated my papers, through whose thinly spread blue surfaces the black figures of my penciling stood out.

He arose.

"I felt sure. Some one told me that you wanted me. Sorry!"

"I'm glad you came, anyway," I wrote. "Help me on this."

In a moment more we were plunged into analysis, and two minds were attempting to seize upon the elusive conclusion that I comprehended but could not grasp.

Parke and I were successful, but I wonder if men will ever use our formula!

To go on—my mate left shortly, and I rose to go on watch. I was pacing the topside runway when I saw Professor Grimes emerge from the manhole leading upward from below, through the gas compartments of the ship.

He waved his hand and stepped quickly forward. On his face was a look of curiosity and expectancy—as there had been on that of Lieutenant Parke.

"What's up?" I queried, knowing him to be the ablest lip-reader aboard.

His gaze fastened upon my eyes.

"Didn't you send for me?" he asked.

I shook my head, smiling dully. Then, suddenly—without rime or reason, perhaps—a startling conclusion leaped to my mind. I reached out and seized his arm.

"Come down to my room!"

Seated there, I wrote:

"What made you think I wanted you up here?"

"I heard some one say that you did, captain."

"Did you hear some one say it, or did you only think so?"

He eyed me seriously for a moment. Then, suddenly, he started half out of his seat. His lips formed the exclamation:

"Good Lord! *That?*"

I nodded—rather grimly, I imagine.

"I did not call you, Professor Grimes. I did not send for you; but when I first went to the observation platform I did wish you were with me. The uncanniness—this licking blue flame—the utter silence— I wanted company, and I wanted yours." I stopped writing for a space, looking into his widened eyes. Then I added: "Has it come to that?"

"Good Lord!" His lips formed the startled words again.

"Half an hour ago," I went on, "I was stumped on that new navigation problem that we're working on. I remember now having wished that Parke was with me. In a minute more he was at the door, saying that he had come because I had called him."

"Good Lord!"

"Electricity—this atmosphere is very little else—dces it carry our *thought?*"

For some minutes we sat there, looking into each other's eyes, wondering, pondering. I, for one, felt strange pricklings run over my skin.

The professor bent, and suddenly asked:

"Or—telepathy?"

"God knows! But it's something—"

Reason swiftly returned. I recalled my mockery of the so-called mediums on earth. I remember, somewhat loathingly now, my scoffing at newspaper reports of strange mind communication in India, in occult circles of San Diego, of uncanny messages of death at sea received by a widow five thousand miles away, before she knew by radio of the ship's disaster that had widowed her.

I had never wondered then—I had only laughed. Coincidence! Or, because told after the real message had arrived, a lie! But now I began to think.

There are magnetic waves running over the close surface of the earth. Might not some few individuals among mankind become mentally attuned? And so, even though unconscious of their own powers, even though hard-headed mockers of things they cannot see, might not their last thought of minds attuned to their own have been communicated to those minds?

Here, twelve miles above the highly magnetized polar region, we are all but electricity ourselves. Are we becoming so intensely electrified that soon we shall not even need to write, shall not need to read the lips, but will be able to read the minds of those with whom we would speak?

Professor Grimes and I set at the task of experiment. It mattered little, we felt, but it would be something new to pass the time.

We were not very successful; yet a glimpse we now and again had of the other's effort to communicate a thought was sufficient. We are on the verge of something else, it seems. We know not entirely why. We only know the fact.

At the end Professor Grimes again bent to his pad. Finishing, he held it grimly before my eyes.

"Is thought electricity? And again—is electricity *life?*"

God only knows!

Even as I write upon this once yellow pad, I seem to see the desk beneath it. As I glance upward, there is a vague sense of intricate framework. Is it the aluminium skeleton of our aircraft that shows itself thus? Is it the electricity that impregnates all matter up here? Or are we shortly to be gifted with an all-seeing, X-ray sight, as well as an all-comprehending mind?

God only knows!

And God knows, too, how I am beginning to envy the resolution and the terrible fortitude of Davis, and Driggs, and the others. Driggs cried as he vaulted over into space:

"I saw it! I *saw!*"

What did he see?

I am interrupted by Leclerc. At least, I feel him call. The matter is urgent, it seems. More later.

IX

Leclerc received me with a secretive look, yet one, too, of wonder, on his sharp little face. He closed the door of his dark room behind me, and turned the key.

I glanced about me in the phosphorescent glow of the cramped space. On the low shelf were three trays, in which I could see, faintly glowing with a bluish white light, placid rectangles of liquid. I recalled his coming to me, the day before, for permission to use a little of the remaining water. We have no use for it, so I had consented. As I then surmised, he had wanted it for some photographic work—the first he had attempted for months.

Now he turned to me and presented a sheet of paper which lies before me as I write. I will give an exact copy of it here:

> But this morning did I think to take photographs of Jones, whose right arm is almost vanish to sight. Jones go to most rear engine compartment with me, and help to carry camera gear. I set up camera, and pose Jones in rear of compartment, with arm up, so to be against sky for background. It is very dark for picture, so I try flash light. Apply match, forgetting lack of air. Useless. I think, too bad—I will try without regard for light. I use three plates, Jones in same position each plate. I tell him to say nothing to you; also tell other men who see what kind of photograph I take to say nothing to you. I bring plates here to develop. Afraid for no success because of darkness and of electrical condition of all things. But will try.
>
> I develop first plate—nothing. I develop second plate—nothing. I develop third plate—and for a minute think I have use old plate by accident, or else my eyes are confuse by memory of old time. It is most strange, that picture on third plate. You will see.

He took the paper from me, and nodded to a solution in the nearest of the three hard rubber trays on his shelf. I bent over it, and rubbed my eyes.

He lifted it closer to the surface, handed me a second bit of paper with a dripping hand, having evidently prepared it for my visit.

"Must look at negative while under solution; otherwise covered with electricity," the paper told me.

I stared stupidly.

The lower part of the plate, as he held it, showed a fairly clean-cut shadow at the left, and a taller, shapeless one rising from it at the right—undoubtedly the protecting bulwark about the engine compartment, and the shadowed figure of the meteorologist, Jones. But Jones's arm, only a tenuously outlined shadow to our eyes, was clear in every detail in this photograph; and close to it, and slightly above, was a woman's face.

Is it to be wondered at that I stared, and that my jaw dropped?

I jerked up from it finally.

"You're not joking—"

Leclerc shook his head vehemently as he read, if not my lips, at least my eyes and expression, or perhaps—he has not said—my thought? He let the plate zigzag through the solution to the bottom of the tray, and, drying his hands, wrote.

"I do not joke, my captain," his pencil told me. "No—I like jokes up here no more than that most unfortunate cook. I am surprised I think to call you. I write on this paper what I have done, and am but ready to take it to you when you are at my door. What can this be, captain?"

"You're sure of the plate?"

He threw out his arms, shoulders high.

"*Mon dieu!*"

"Dead sure?"

"From a new box," he scribbled quickly. "See!"

He showed me the freshly torn wrappings, brushing off the flickering stuff that I might see the clean tears in the paper.

I turned for the door, deciding that Professor Grimes should see. Then, with a grim shrug, I bethought me of my experience a trifle earlier in the day.

" Professor Grimes will be here in a moment," I wrote. " I have called him."

Leclerc gave me one of his peculiar, ratlike, questioning glances, and bent again over his tray.

A moment later, and I knew Grimes was at the door. Indeed, such now was the indefinite consistency of the dark room's bulkheads that I fancied I could make out his form beyond the closed door. I unlocked and opened it, and he entered, with questioning wonder on his face.

" You see I received your message," his lips said.

I motioned Leclerc to give him the first writing. Then Grimes bent with us over the tray. After half a minute he straightened stiffly and brought out his pad and pencil.

" Davis and some of the others," he wrote quickly, " complained of being touched by something; and remember Driggs's last cry—that he had *seen*."

He handed me the paper with a grim nod. Instantly did my mind jump to a conclusion—one which now, five hours after the event, I still maintain.

This photograph—the face and part of the shoulder of a woman! Davis and five others had gone to certain doom because they could stand no more. They had been *touched*. So, indeed, had the professor. So had I. So, as has been reported to me during the last two weeks, has every other man on board this ghostly ship.

But Davis and the other five—were they more susceptible to the electric atmosphere than the rest of us? True, they were the first to have parts of their bodies fade into partial invisibility; but was that uncanny vanishing the entire cause of their choice of certain annihilation rather than uncertain existence? Had they not all, perhaps, *seen?* Succumbing to the mysterious power, had they not finally thought actual madness was coming on, when the truth was that they had *seen?* And did they tell me of their disappearing limbs simply because they felt they would be at once adjudged insane if they told what they had *seen?*

The parts of Leclerc's photograph that were the most obscure were those which to our naked eyes were most clearly visible. The parts of the photograph that were most boldly apparent were the woman's face and Jones's right arm—the former entirely invisible to our eyes, the latter rapidly becoming so.

Had those others been the first of us to *see?*

Aye—I believe that is the truth.

December 23, 1920.—Leclerc was not hoaxing us. To-day I myself took more than twenty photographs. Ten of these were of members of our diminished personnel whose limbs the persistently seeking electricity has rendered all but transparent. Five I took while standing on the topside runway, with the camera facing blank space to port of the ship. The other five I made haphazard at odd moments as I went about the ship.

Leclerc and the professor and Parke were with me when I took the photographs, and our entire quartet crowded into the little dark room to watch the developing.

Another peculiar feature of our situation is that although the dark room is no longer dark, although it is continually aglow with the ubiquitous living blue stuff, nevertheless this light does not affect the plates. The usual red lamp used in dark rooms is not necessary. In fact, had it been required, the work could not have been done, for since our electric light is unavailable, and the lack of oxygen in the air effectually estops our use of oil lanterns, we have no artificial illumination at all.

It was this lack that had previously prevented Leclerc's photographic work. Because of the insufferable monotony, he had made his first experiment without any light save that of the lambent fluid. He had held no hope of any success, and what he found on his third plate—the look in his eyes told me how it had amazed him.

We developed the score of plates I had exposed. In each case where the photograph had been of the semitransparent portions of men's bodies, those portions were depicted with a clarity of lineament, as well as of outline, that was nothing less than astonishing. The parts we could still normally see, in the deep twilight surrounding our ghostly ship of the air, were blurred and shadowlike.

We watched in suspense for the appearance of what all of us in the little cubicle had come to suspect; but it was not until we developed the five plates I had used on the topside runway that we found anything unusual. On two of these we could make out dim shadows—upright shadows, one of them bifurcated in the lower part, as might appear the legs of a man. On the third was a larger shadow, in the shape of the head and shoulders of a human being.

That was almost enough; but when one of the plates I had exposed haphazard about the ship blackened into the clear nude body of a man, we were convinced.

About us are living humans — another phase of life. How, why, whence, we cannot say; but the camera did not lie. The plates are from a sealed package bearing the government stamp. We exposed them ourselves; we ourselves developed them.

It can only mean, thinks the professor, that as we disappear up here from our normal life, we appear in that other phase or plane. What the end is, what kind of life it may be, we can only conjecture. Meanwhile—we live.

Meanwhile, too, we have been attempting, the professor and I, to get into telepathic touch with our families at home. We have tried to attune our minds to those back on Aluakat. We have not thus far been successful.

But to-day our own power to communicate with each other is stronger than it was yesterday. Who will say how it may be to-morrow?

Even as I write, I feel something touching my shoulder—as if a butterfly had wandered high in these miles above earth, and were fluttering about my head. I have turned twice, but as yet I have seen nothing. Remembering Davis and the others, and the photographs we have seen to-day, I wonder how long it will be before I turn —and *see*. And what will it be—the thing, or the things, that I shall see?

You may remember the day when Leclerc called me to his dark room, and showed me how our bodies glowed. Now there is no need to enter a place where the natural light—what little we have—is shut off. As I sit here, I believe I could write—indeed, I do write—by the radiance of my own body.

As I sit here, every bit of surface in my room flows with bluish white electricity. It flickers in a wide rectangular pool upon my bunk, it runs with gentle insistence upon the edges of my desk. The photograph of my father is hidden beneath a film of it. This writing I can see for a space, and then it is overflowed. My pencil is coated with bluish light, and when I raise it from the paper the fluid electricity rollows like a cord, like gum, thinning as it draws away, finally breaking, and, as if completely elastic, withdrawing instantly to the pad and the pencil.

Horrible—yes, but I am seized with a great curiosity now. I dread what may be; yet, since fate has set me here, I want to see what I may. I curse fate—we all do, a daily anathema—yet I would like above all things to throw her mockery back in her face.

It is this alone, I think, that holds most of us who are left from going mad, or from taking the same means to find an end as did Davis and those who followed him to annihilation.

X

February 15, 1921.—We are one and all seized with gloom. We are reduced to nineteen men in all. Driggs was the last to destroy himself, so far as we know, but since that date eight others have disappeared. We do not know where; we believe we know how—they have simply vanished from our sight.

We communicate with one another now entirely by telepathy. We have only to think positively of the person with whom we would exchange our thoughts. He receives the call, and, if disposed to speech, we receive his thought to that effect; but we do not indulge much in communicating our thoughts. We dare not.

The seven-hundred-foot cigar-shaped bulk of the balloon overhead has become merely a vast hovering shadow. The deck we soundlessly tread is a still slighter shadow. We can see the brighter stars directly overhead, despite the fact that the balloon is yet there—a half luminous, half transparent body. Through the bulkheads of our rooms we can see the rising moon in the east.

Walking listlessly about our useless duties, we feel almost that we are treading upon air. We are approaching our end, whatever that end may be.

The professor and I and Barlow, the chief radio electrician—Barlow's powerful body seems to withstand the electric atmosphere best of all the men, and his mind still retains a dying spark of the life that we once knew—are once more beginning to conjecture. Shall we simply dissolve into nothingness, as the eight men who vanished seem to have done? Shall we dissolve thus and become part of the great waves of terrestrial magnetism that sweep from magnetic pole to magnetic pole? Or shall we in some way retain our shapes, our individual physical entities?

Is it disintegration, such as undoubtedly came in a more violent way to Davis, Driggs, and the other five who threw themselves into space? Or is it only the passing into another existence?

Our photographs—the first and last we have taken—would seem to point to the latter; but we do not know, we do not know.

To think that ten months have passed!

April 15, 1921.—Ten more of us have vanished. We realize now how certainly must that be the end of us all. There is no way to prevent it, it seems. At least, we can think of none.

The fact that we have not all gone out together merely points out, we think, that some bodies withstand the insidious impregnation of electricity better than others. It does not hint at any exception. We all must go. Sooner or later we shall all be out of the life we know.

In the last month the balloon above us has become almost entirely invisible. Only here and there, where the aluminium alloy framework is of heavier construction, can we see it. It is not pleasant, seeing above one's head the slowly decomposing skeleton of the ship that fetched us hither. It is too awfully suggestive of the fate of our own bodies.

We, the nine of us still visible to one another, dwell now in one compartment. We communicate but little, yet we live thus for fear of the horror of passing out alone. We go about the ship in pairs. We literally feel our way, lest inadvertently we should walk over into space; and we have sworn not to end our own lives, come what may.

The winter must still be reigning far below us. The sky above and the space beneath still are dark. Above us is that ghostly apparition that was once the splendid Rappahannock. Below us we faintly see the decks. We ourselves are wraith-like spirits of the dead silently passing here and there, with eyes askance, not daring even to read one another's minds—feeling, sensing, knowing the gloom of dull waiting that must be there.

June 25, 1921.—To-day I saw!

Six of our nine have gone as did the rest. Grimes, Barlow, and myself are left. Barlow is sitting beside me as I write, a grim-faced being of tenuous outline — waiting. Professor Grimes is somewhere about the ship.

To-day I *saw*. I saw faint outlines out beyond the ship. I saw movement—forms. I communicated with Grimes, and pointed. "No," his answer came back; but Barlow nodded.

"Men—shapes of men."

He started, one ghostly arm stretching rigidly out.

"*Barnes!*"

Barnes! The name of one of the engine-men, among the first to vanish from out of sight! I sought to make out his heavy-set figure.

Barlow was wildly excited. His thoughts swept on.

"There—he's there! And others I—I—don't know. A hundred of them! Good God! Annie! Annie! Annie!"

His wife, of course. I started, sank back. No, he did not mean that she was there. He was merely calling her name in his despair.

In a flash I urged him:

"Can you get in touch with her? Can you—reach her mind on earth?"

He sank back, his hands over his eyes, and slowly shook his head.

Grimes returned.

"You are in trouble?"

I told him.

"Perhaps — perhaps — in time. Many things occur on earth—things at which we laughed. Conan Doyle—Sir Oliver Lodge—others have claimed to have seen — to have established communication."

I pray that the end may soon come. Oh, this waiting—waiting—waiting!

July 4, 1921.—Independence Day! What irony! I alone am left, a prisoner in horrid space.

Space? I must confess.

Yesterday, after I called to Grimes and received no answer, weakness came. I stepped to the ghostly rail of an engine compartment. I leaped over the side—and I *did not fall!*

Did I touch solid footing? I do not know. I simply did not fall.

I put out a hand and stepped back into the compartment.

There is a great blur about the ship now. The structure itself is almost gone.

My weakness I have perforce thrown aside. Before my own final dissolution—if that be our end, and since Barlow's excitement I do not think it is—I will try to seal this record, so that it will be proof against the electricity about me. There are a few heavier sheets of hard rubber which still, I noted to-day, retain much of their normal condition and appearance. I tested a bit to-day, and it fell, although my own body would not. In the ghostly luminosity of what is left of the Rappahannock, these sheets still lie opaque and substantial to my sight.

There is a chance, a chance, and I pray God that it will not fail, for I want no other men to follow us to this place.

July 7, 1921.—All is ready. I can make no parachute. I will simply seal this in a tin, inclose it in hard rubber, and drop it over the side.

Whether or not it will fall, I do not know. Since my own attempt of yesterday I doubt it; but perhaps, because this rubber is less eaten into by the fluid all about us here, it may succumb to gravity. I pray that this may be so.

A woman's face—and smiling!

The stuff will not brush from my paper now.

A line more, which I cannot see:

To my brother—

XI

THAT was what we read—Sergeant Harrow and I—standing on the northern snow, with the charred fragments of rubber at our feet.

Long, long, we stared up into the clear blue of the sky. Nothing—nothing to be seen! And yet, even as we stared, twelve miles or more above us in that clear blue was my brother—or what was once my brother.

We returned to our planes. We debated whether or not we should send one of them up to search the aërial altitudes. It was argued that the highest ascent possible to the type of craft we had with us was only about eighteen thousand feet. Moreover, our fuel reserve would not admit of the attempt.

We returned to our landing place east of Point Barrow. We sailed thence for Aluakat. I radioed a code message to Washington—and we were ordered, under oath of secrecy, home.

In Washington I told my story, and showed the strange message dropped from the unknown.

A year passed, and nothing was done. I urged that nothing should be done, for I, as no other man on earth, know my brother; and if I have his warning, I have enough.

I resigned from the navy. The loss of my brother's aid and sympathy in things pertaining to the service made all thoughts of continuing in it alone unbearable.

And now I read in the newspapers that " a scientific expedition, in a dirigible aircraft of the Zeppelin type, headed by officers of the United States Navy, will sail on such and such a date for Nome, Alaska, which is to be its base in the Far North."

I will make no comment on this announcement, save to express a fervent hope. May the fate of the new expedition be different from that of the brave men who perished with the Rappahannock!

THE END

THE VOYAGER

NEVER have I been far from home,
  Nor sailed the sea at all;
I know not rig of bark or of brig
  From schooner or from yawl;

But I have stood upon the shore
  And heard the singing wind
Till, farther far than farthest star,
  I've left the world behind!

F. L. Montgomery

The Discard

A ROMANCE OF INDIA—THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A MAN WHOM CIVILIZATION CAST OUT

By Kenneth Perkins

Author of " Queen of the Night," etc.

THE steamer Shah Jehan, of the Bombay Red Star Line, held her course through the night as if hanging motionless in space. The placid surface of the Arabian Sea—the color of old mahogany—merged into the sky without a semblance of horizon.

Starlight found its way through the vaporous shadow overhead, making paths of light on the surface of the water. It seemed as if the ship was sailing in a misty tropical sky, with stars below as well as above. For all the pulsating of her turbines, the Shah Jehan appeared to make no progress. The stars did not move; and neither the bow wave, a cascade of phosphorescence, nor the unchanging geometrical angle of the wake, gave the impression of motion.

On the after deck the skipper, the first officer, and several passengers lolled in deck chairs, eager for a breath of wind. All sustained the illusion of an immutable quiescence, of stagnation.

Lighted cheroots described lazy curves, like fireflies, their color a sharp red in contrast to the jade fire of the wake. There was little sound. A punkah flapped steadily, attached by slender rods to the turbines, in tune with the rhythm of the propeller and the churning water. At long intervals a flying fish skimmed past the rail.

There were intervals of conversation—languid, low-voiced — about subjects that were superficial. The skipper, an angular, sharp-faced man — was describing certain rare chutneys, wines, and preserved mangoes and other fruits on board. He had taken them from a Rajput in Bombay, in payment of a debt.

This was followed by a long interval of silence, of gasping for fresh air, of wiping wet foreheads, of anxious puffing at cheroots. The talk drifted to the country whose shore they were passing—a feudatory state on the western coast of British India. Apparently this also failed to incite interest. The group was passionless under the spell of a drowsy, lethal night.

Underneath that stagnant surface, however, a conflict—a consuming, terrific contest—was being waged. It centered about one member of the group—a girl.

A fight for the hand of a girl, as the skipper himself had observed, becomes more intense, more desperate, as you approach the equator. A woman in the tropics is more alluring, more dangerous. This girl was not the only one who had caused trouble on the Bombay Red Star Line, and she was not the most attractive. Beautiful she was, no doubt, reclining there in her deck chair. Her white frock seemed to be of the same ethereal stuff as the smoke of her cigarette, her hair of the same nebulous shadow as the background of water and sky.

The skipper's instinct and experience gave him an understanding of the whole trouble. He had no desire to have a duel fought on board his ship. He had no desire for even a scene. When he entertained his passengers that night, he was conscious of acting as a mediator. Again he led the conversation out of the dangers of dead silence.

" The country over there "—he pointed to port—" is called Pangal. If there was light, you'd see that we're ranging close along the coast."

" A curious thing I've heard of that country," said Major Dysart. He was one of the contenders for the girl's hand—an im-

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maculately dressed military gentleman with thin, blackened eyebrows and a waxed blond mustache. His cheroot was stuck in a holder, the length of an Indian bamboo fife. "They say there are no Englishmen in the whole state, even though we rule it."

"Oh, there must be! How about the daroga? He must be an Englishman!" It was the girl who objected. She had heard that all these little principalities in British India, even the independent feudatory states, are directly responsible to the imperial government. The ruler may be a Hindu or Mohammedan prince—in some cases a powerful ruler — but the British power is represented by a resident agent or ambassador.

"The government representative in Pangal happens to be a Hindu," the major went on. "Of course, he's little more than an ambassador. He certainly ought to be an Englishman. Ridiculous, the way we're letting these natives run things; but it's the case."

"I don't believe it," the girl said. "There must be an Englishman somewhere there."

"But I assure you—"

Her suitor checked himself. It was not politic to contradict the girl he was trying to win, even though he had definite information that he was in the right.

"I dare say I may be mistaken," he apologized. "At least, I have no desire to prove that you are wrong or that I am right."

"You do not feel at liberty to contradict a lady, Major Dysart," said Gregory Ross. Gregory Ross was the other suitor—a young man of athletic build, with clear, steel-like eyes and a sensitive face. "If I contradict you, you will perhaps feel free to maintain your statement. Permit me to say that undoubtedly there is an Englishman in Pangal."

"Did you ever hear of Pangal before?" Major Dysart asked hotly.

"Never," the other man replied.

The major's flush of anger was masked by the darkness, but every one heard his voice tremble in fury.

"Yes, I feel at liberty to contradict you," he admitted. "There has been no Englishman or white man whatsoever in Pangal for three years."

"I contend, as Miss Smith-Vincent has contended, that you are mistaken," insisted Gregory Ross.

"Gentlemen, let us take the matter to the skipper," Lord Caithny suggested. Lord Caithny, a thin-haired old gentleman clothed in whites, had only that afternoon offered Gregory Ross a position in his Madras bank. "Do you happen to know the answer to this extraordinarily interesting question, skipper?"

"I do," the latter said.

Feeling the extreme delicacy of his position, the captain hemmed and coughed uncertainly.

"Before you tell us, skipper," Major Dysart said, "suppose we place a wager."

"A very good idea!" Gregory Ross agreed briskly.

He realized that he was betting on something about which he knew nothing, and against a man who seemed very definitely informed; but there was no way out of it now.

"Let us say the loser gives a dinner—"

"Excellent!" Ross chimed in. "The loser gives a dinner to—shall we say to Miss Smith-Vincent?"

"A jolly good suggestion!" the major retorted belligerently. "And let the dinner be embellished with the captain's old Rajput wines, chutneys, and so forth, of which he has just told us. All, of course, at my expense—or at yours, if you should lose. Let us put it this way—the winner of the wager orders the dinner and the loser pays for it."

"Agreed!"

All faces turned to the skipper. No one cared a fig whether there were any Englishmen in Pangal or not. No one had ever been there. No one had any interests there. Lord Caithny's bank did no business with its traders. There was no port of call there for the steamship lines. The officers of the Shah Jehan knew of no one who had ever touched there, except the crew of a vessel that had been shipwrecked on the Pangal coast.

The major knew that the Indian Army had no problems to deal with in that remote principality. Mrs. Smith-Vincent, the girl's mother, had never heard of any polo matches, or hill stations, or Anglo-Indian society life in its mountains. The fact was that only one thing concerned the group gathered on the after deck that night: Who was going to give the proposed banquet?

"Since you have left it to me," the skipper said reluctantly, "all I can do is to decide on the merits of the case. *It is my honest belief that there are no Englishmen in Pangal.*"

"Then the major is right," Ross said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I lose. The dinner—yes, let me see!"

It so happened that Gregory Ross had been cleaned out at cards only an hour before. He was rapidly estimating just how much he could sell his watch for—a few pounds, perhaps. Multiply that by fifteen, to make it rupees. Yes, that was a tidy little sum—enough for a good dinner for two passengers, but no more. He spoke up bravely:

"I am to pay, but you are to order, major."

"Send me the steward," the major said readily.

Ross began to scent imminent disaster. "If it's just one of our ordinary dinners," he was saying to himself, "I might borrow a pound or two extra; but—"

A Goa boy in Eton jacket, white trousers, and bare feet, who had been busy serving ices to the group, summoned the steward. The major gave the order.

"To-morrow night there is to be a dinner in honor of Miss Smith-Vincent. You will serve it not in the dining saloon, but here on deck, weather permitting. There will be seven guests—Mrs. Smith-Vincent, Miss Verna Smith-Vincent, Lord Caithny, the captain, the first officer, Mr. Gregory Ross, and myself. I want a chuprassy to stand behind each guest with a peacock fan. You have peacock fans, of course, steward?"

"I have fans of one kind or another, sir, if the punkah don't suffice."

"The punkah will not suffice—nor will the Bombay duck you serve, nor the claret. I want a dinner of dahl, pomegranates, Birni dates, dried comfits, champagne, khabob—the sort you served when we put out from Bombay."

"Khabob!" Ross repeated to himself. "That means that I sell my shoes!"

"Then of course you have sesame seed taffy, and in the coffee I want cognac and anisette. I understand that the captain has a stock of old fine sweetmeats and oriental liqueurs. These are for sale, I hope, captain?"

"They are, but it seems to me that the expense—"

The major waved his hand.

"The expense! Will the expense stop us, Mr. Ross?"

Gregory Ross wiped his forehead.

"Dash it all, of course not!" he cried.

"Spare no expense, steward. Those are your words, Mr. Ross?"

"You were to order the dinner, major," Ross said with a successful attempt at gayety.

"Very well, then," the major went on. "The bokha should be served warmed four hours in the galley, four hours on deck, and poured from an earthenware jug to get the taste. Also such chutneys, preserved mangoes, and sweetmeats as were taken aboard at Bombay on the captain's own account."

The steward turned with a blank face to the skipper.

"Ain't been an order like this one since the queen's jubilee—not on this ship!" he exclaimed.

Gregory Ross also turned to the skipper, and plucked him by the sleeve. Here was one man whom he could not bluff, unless he desired to be an out-and-out impostor. The captain would have to be paid. Gregory must tell him that he didn't have a farthing to his name.

"Aye, what?" said the skipper. "You wanted to tell me something, Mr. Ross?"

"Never mind just now," Ross rejoined.

Major Dysart was speaking, and Gregory had to listen to him, for apparently he was adding one more blow.

"And now the champagne," the fellow was saying.

"Champagne?" Ross shouted, with the swagger of desperation. "Champagne for a feast of this sort? What's the matter with that coronation wine of the Maharaja of Shamgad? I heard there's some of it on board."

"But—" the skipper began, flabbergasted at such generosity.

"The Shamgad coronation wine! Oh, my winkie!" the steward exclaimed. "A hundred pounds a jug! Holy cripes!"

"Seven guests—seven jugs!" Ross cried, with a flourish of his hand. "Put that down!"

There were exclamations of surprise and delight.

"A good loser!" from Lord Caithny.

"He's a bit of all right!" from Mr. Marley, the first officer.

"What magnanimity!" the girl's mother put in.

"Oh, Mr. Ross, how *lovely* of you!" cried the only one who counted — Verna Smith-Vincent.

"Rotten-Rowing it, that's what he's doing—the bounder!" Major Dysart muttered under his breath.

The captain said nothing, until he was able to speak to Ross privately.

"A rather lavish generosity, my good man," he said, when he and Gregory had gone to his room, ostensibly to discuss the preparations for the banquet.

"Generosity, hell!" Ross replied. "I might as well tell you right now, skipper—I haven't a farthing left to my name. An hour ago the major cleaned me out at cards."

II

On deck, the other members of the group could not help passing their opinions.

"A very promising young man, that Ross," Lord Caithny adjudged. "I want young bloods with his personality in my bank."

"He came to my rescue, and I think he's perfectly lovely," the girl affirmed. "Major, I think you're horrid making him bet that way when you knew he was—" She would not admit that Gregory had been wrong. "I still think there *must* be an Englishman somewhere in Pangal."

"My child, that part of the argument is over," Mrs. Smith-Vincent admonished.

"You caught him in a trap, major," Lord Caithny said; "but he came through gamely."

"I had no idea that he was not a man of any means," Mrs. Smith-Vincent said. "I must have been mistaken. A very interesting boy!"

"Good sport, anyway," said the first officer.

"He has a private income, no doubt." Mrs. Smith-Vincent was still on the same tack. "We must ask him for a week-end at Ooty, my dear, during the races."

"Lovely!" cried Verna.

"Rotten-Rowing it!" the major muttered again, to himself. "We'll see how long he can swell around like this! If I know the captain of this ship, something's going to happen!"

The captain of the Shah Jehan was at that moment discussing a very delicate matter with the gentleman who had so recently found favor in the sight of Verna Smith-Vincent.

The skipper, who had spent forty years at sea—most of it in the East India and China trade—was known to many merchants and shipowners as a scrupulous but hard-dealing man. The fate of gamblers on board his ship had often been left in his hands, and as he grew older he showed less mercy toward them.

"If what you say is true," he began, "about the major having cleaned you out at cards, it leaves you in a rather peculiar position, Mr. Ross."

"It does, skipper," Ross admitted. He lit his cheroot at the proffered hand. "Not only in a peculiar position, but in a very disagreeable one. Here I am forced into a bet which Major Dysart knew was a sure thing—for him. My reputation with Miss Smith-Vincent is at stake, not to mention her mother. As for Lord Caithny—upon whom I am depending for a position when I go ashore penniless at Madras—I understand he is somewhat of a sporting gentleman of the old school himself. Jove, I'd come a fine cropper in *his* eyes! If I went back on a bet, I'd be disgraced throughout all British India. You're all like a family out here, they say. One Englishman can't hide away from another between Calcutta and Tuticorin. The bet simply had to go through. I lost—I have to pay."

"But with what?" the captain asked blandly.

Gregory Ross stood aghast.

"Is it possible?" he cried, when he regained his breath. "Damn it all, I'll write you a note!"

"For twenty years, Mr. Ross, I have made it a practice not to accept such notes. The result is that my family in Yarmouth is living in comfort, and my own berth is a fairly decent one for a man of my age. I suggest that you should try to borrow the money from some one else."

"I suppose you will suggest my borrowing from the major!" cried Ross, enraged. "Or perhaps from Lord Caithny! I just heard Lord Caithny say that he would do business with borrowers, but would never employ them in his bank."

"I suggest, then, that you should call the dinner off, Mr. Ross," the captain said pleasantly.

"That's a jolly good one! How will it sound—'Braggart on Shah Jehan Orders Great Feast and Crawls Out of It'? You know jolly well that I'd drown myself first. Any man would."

"You might pretend illness," the skipper said, still with his ironical calmness.

"Illness for to-morrow—then what? The dinner would be served the next night. Could I crawl into a bunk and stay there till we get to Madras, with every one suspicious and asking for me every day? Jove, what a disgrace! What beggary! To slink off and barter with my own self-respect!"

There was no conclusion to that argument. There could have been none. The skipper was an immovable body; Ross was an irresistible force. Luckily the silvery laugh of Verna Smith-Vincent broke in upon the storm and stilled it.

She stopped at the threshold of the skipper's stateroom. Major Dysart appearing behind her shoulder, called out gayly:

"May we come in, skipper? There's something you must know." Ross and the captain turned abruptly. "Congratulate me, gentlemen! I have won!"

"You're engaged?" the skipper exclaimed, with a sigh of tremendous relief.

Thank God, he thought, the combat was over!

"Miss Smith-Vincent has consented to be my wife."

The skipper poured out a little drink for four. Gregory Ross stood dazed. He lifted his glass with the others.

"To Miss Verna—" he said.

"We haven't told any one else," said Verna, "only mother, and she is so much delighted!"

"We'll announce it to-morrow," added the major.

"Congratulations!" Ross was finally able to say. "I say, look here—why not make that feast an engagement supper?"

"Splendid!" the girl cried.

Dysart and the skipper exchanged glances. The latter burst out into a laugh.

"Splendid, I say! Here, let's drink to the luckiest man on this ship—and then another, to the loser!"

It struck two bells.

"You are still determined?" the skipper said, when he was again left with Ross.

"I am."

"But it's all over."

"No—now that it's an engagement supper, I can't get out of it. If I mortgage my soul—"

"I've never been able to capitalize on souls. Think it over. By eight bells come and see me again. I'll help you out the best I can. Hang it all, my dear man, if you hadn't pulled that one about the coronation wine!"

"Desperation! It's got to be."

"Another drink?"

"Thank you." They held up their glasses. "Good night!"

Ross sauntered out of the captain's room and strolled aft on the main deck.

It was all over now. Well, it was rather a relief, in a way! He knew that he was not acceptable to Verna, or to her mother, or to any one else. The ship had passed judgment on him. The ship, with its integral life, with its isolation from the earth, with his existence typified in the person of the captain, had passed judgment on him and found him wanting.

Mrs. Smith-Vincent thought of Ross only in terms of his fortune—which had no existence. The girl had no feelings except such as were allowed her by her mother. She would make a very good match with Major Dysart, and he was welcome to her.

Even the major—a cad, if ever there was one—had bested Gregory Ross. The captain had bested him. The ship—that is to say, life—had bested and discarded him!

Beating down the moon path, a catamaran passed almost under the stern of the Shah Jehan. Ross could plainly see the black bodies of two natives with breechcloths and turbans. In the canoe itself there was the gleam of silvery fish. The whole thing floated on the shining brazen surface of the water not a hundred yards away.

Ross gave a glance toward the companionway. The girl had just gone below. Her form—a graceful white wraith—vanished, faded from out of his life.

A deck hand, half asleep, crouched against a hatch coaming. From the saloon there drifted the sound of a mechanical piano beating out a catchy dance air. A chuprassy slipped by in shuffling sandals, with a tray, glasses, and tinkling ice. Men at cards were laughing. The world, typified by the Shah Jehan, was merry.

The chuprassy—a white ghost—appeared in a band of light before a porthole, and vanished. Again Ross was alone, while many voices, musical notes, lapping waves, whirled about and through him in a merry jingle of laughter.

Ross swung himself up to the rail and stood for a moment, estimating how far he would have to dive in the cascade of phosphorescence churned up by the screw. Not far!

He jumped.

A blackness of warm salt water engulfed him. For what seemed an eternity the currents and cross currents of the wake rolled him in an element of darkness that was warmer than the night air. Then he came up abruptly into moonlight, with a cool surface breeze, pungent of the spices of the shore, caressing his face.

With a stroke that was easy, graceful, unlimited in power, he sent handfuls of water surging behind him in a burst of phosphorescence. He soon got his stride swimming a single overhand toward the catamaran.

A few moments later he grabbed the outrigger log and scrambled up from the water. The three fishermen prayed to their gods to save them from this water devil, this mahoo, this terrible being breathed out of the mists of night. They yelled and threw up their paddles. They knelt, gibbering, howling, screaming, huddled up forward in a heap.

Gregory Ross scrambled over the side of the rude craft, landed in a bamboo bunbox which was alive with oily fish, and, having regained his breath, threw the paddles forward to the terror-stricken natives.

" Pangal," was the only word of their language that he could speak.

They understood. They crawled to their places, hunched over to their business of moving their awkward structure across the glassy surface. The tide seemed favorable, for moment by moment Gregory Ross noticed that the moonlit coast of Pangal moved toward them. It reached out long, palm-tufted arms on either side, closed in aft, and took them to itself.

III

It so happened that the captain of the Shah Jehan, in settling that little bet between Ross and Major Dysart, had made a mistake. There *was* a white man in Pangal—an Englishman. In reality the major would have had to pay for that dinner, if the skipper, who was adjudged infallible, had only been properly informed.

The name of the man was Grimsby—never Mr. Grimsby, never Brian Grimsby, never Grimsby of Elephant Rocks House, never anything more than plain Grimsby, except when referred to by the natives, when it was, of course, Grimsby Sahib.

He was a heavy-set, middle-aged man with a wrinkled, sallow face and bulging eyes, the brown of which always seemed blood-red. His mouth sagged at the left, where there was a trickle of blood-red from the wad of betel leaves and lime that he inveterately chewed. His hands were fat and thick, the wrists hairy, the backs alive with wriggling veins.

Sitting at a table in a dark room, Grimsby Sahib ate his early morning chota hazri. His huge frame was clothed in pyjamas that gave the impression of being as damp and soiled as the chunam walls and concrete floor of the musty old bungalow.

Grimsby Sahib's home was a large, ramshackle, rotten place enveloped by a series of verandas, like husks about an ear of corn. The first veranda was shaded by a palm thatch top, the second by tiles, the third by flat masonry, which seemed part of the bungalow itself. To get into the bungalow you had to pass through several partitions of wet tatti curtains. The sun, of course, had never touched the place since the first damp chunam and cement was plastered upon its floors and walls.

The bungalow was dank enough to produce mold on the chits, the mosquito nettings, and the punkahs. Fish moths had eaten the rafters. The crannies were alive with scorpions, to whose poison Grimsby Sahib was immune, because of being so often bitten. You would expect to find toadstools in any corner. In fact, the color of the bungalow itself—a smirched white with greenish water stains—suggested nothing so much as the texture of a mushroom.

From the lower veranda of the bungalow Grimsby Sahib had an excellent view of Pangal. From the base of the cliff upon which his house was located he could look down the long slope of jungle—a steaming tract of bamboo, teak, and banyan, discolored at the lower end by the mists of the sea. In the foreground there was a checkerboard of varicolored squares—jade, green, tawny brown, yellow—which were the rice paddies. In the center of the landscape the gopura of a temple loomed over the tops of banyans and the town of Pangal itself.

Literally thousands of thatched huts, with walls plastered with cow dung, were hidden by the dense foliage; but broken-down storehouses at the river's edge were discovered in a clearing, and before them were the rusty tracks and débris of a tramway. Three wharves reached out into the muddy river, but no ships had been able to stand in through the delta since the days when the French kept the channel dredged.

The advent of the East India Company, and the decline of French power, had left Pangal as it was in ancient times. The river was a torrent of mud, filling up the channel at such a rate that the small export trade in teak, coir, oilseed, and raw jute did not pay for its dredging. Nature herself had hemmed in the Gaekwar of Pangal in a retreat which it would cost the British a good lac of rupees a year to keep open.

Since the evacuation of the French, Pangal had reverted to the isolation of a native feudatory state. It was inaccessible from the water, except for dhows and luggers of small draft, which could make the delta in three tides. Nowadays the old seaport harbored little more than a fleet of fishing boats—mainly catamarans.

"It was in a catamaran you say that this toff came ashore?" Grimsby Sahib asked of his old matey.

The latter was a pundit and philosopher in his way. The external aspect of events concerned him little. He was always a seeker after truth, and therefore cared only for the hidden meaning of events.

"He came out of the sea itself, sahib, so it is said. Certain of the fish-eating pariahs of the coast were out in their boats, and, being unable to make use of sails, were compelled to paddle about. Thus losing the first tide to bring them up the delta, they cast their nets during the night."

"They found him in the Roads — ain't that it?" Grimsby Sahib asked. "The bloke fell off one of them Bombay boats, is my way of figurin'."

"Peradventure, sahib, but they considered a mahoo had been sent from the sea to destroy them. He sat among the fish, sahib, while they, fearing for their very souls, paddled him up the river."

Having finished his chota hazri, Grimsby Sahib shoved the dishes away and lit a cheroot.

"How did he fight?" he asked, when he had made himself comfortable.

"Like seven mahoos, with seven arms to each one!" the matey declared. "He came into the market place and was immediately apprehended by the Gaekwar's sipahis. Chookra, the money changer, who speaks many languages, acted as interpreter. They asked him his business, and he said he was investigating a certain question. The barbarian wanted to know if there were any Englishmen in this principality."

"That's a damned good joke!" Grimsby guffawed.

"When he was told that there were none, a convulsion of fury took hold of him, as if he were possessed of twenty devils. With his bare hands he fought against the sipahis, sending them rolling in the dust. Then, taking the gun of one, and finding it too dirty to shoot, he used the butt end to fell many more. By this time the street was a bedlam of screaming women, hawkahs, whose wares were scattered over the ground in the tumult, water carriers, buffaloes, monkeys—yes, and Brahmans, too, surging this way and that to see this white man fight a division of the Gaekwar's army!"

Grimsby seemed tremendously amused. His great fat muscles, jowls, shoulders, and hips, seemed to join in the process of chuckling.

"And how did they catch the blasted young typhoon?" he laughed.

"There were reserves," the matey explained. "The devil Englishman himself was felled with the butt end of a gun. The soldiers doubtless were ordered not to kill him, for the Gaekwar likes these white men brought to him alive."

"Yes, yes, I know all about *that!* The old jackal likes to keep his cake a while afore eatin' it. Well, he shan't get this young cocky. *I* want him! How did my boys cop him?"

"Out of the mob there came a poisoned thorn—that was all. It put an end to the combat. It caught one of the sipahis in the neck, and every one beheld it sticking there. The low-caste sipahi falls in a faint, his dark face turns yellow. The populace knew then that our clan, sahib, had its hand in the trouble. The soldiers themselves fled, and so did the herdsmen, the hawkahs, the lepers, the sunnyassis. The place was deserted of a sudden—except for the man who had blown that thorn and the white man who had been felled in the dust. He looked up. The thorn blower—your own shikari—told him that if he wanted to see an Englishman, they would bring him to one. He swore great oaths to his gods, and looked around for more men to knock down, but behold, there were none. Therefore he consented to be brought here to see you."

"Excellent! Now that I've finished my breakfast, I'm ready for visitors. Show this young rotter to me, and I'll deal with him. Fought the Gaekwar's army, did he? Zowie!" A suppressed guffaw. "The young snipe! I'll have fun with him, damn my black ole soul!"

In another moment the newcomer to Pangal stood before Grimsby Sahib. He was a young man of fine stature and build. His well-shaped head was held high. His straight neck merged into two magnificent sloping shoulders—shoulders that were bare except for a shred or two of what was left of his shirt. Bruised and bleeding as those shoulders were, they gave the impression of being too strong to bow beneath anything less than the blow of an ax.

"Damme if you ain't the most extraordinary fellow!" Grimsby exclaimed through grinning, betel-blackened teeth.

The young man was about to ask his host if he had never seen an Englishman before, but he stood there engrossed, for a moment, in the curious surroundings in which he found himself—the dark, moldy room, the tiger skin on the whitewashed floor, the elephant tusks behind Grimsby's square, thin-haired cranium, the ragged punkah flapping just above, the group of bats hanging up in a corner of the ceiling.

"Can you tell me, me lad," Grimsby went on, without offering his guest a seat, "just how do you manage to swim about the coast here and not be gulped down by a shark?"

"Will you permit me to sit down and have a smoke?" the young man asked heatedly. "Or am I before a municipal judge here, that you keep me standing while you go on with your damnable catechizing?"

"Wow, but that's fine!" Grimsby roared. "Swellin' around already like you was my adopted son and heir! I like your cheek, my young randy-dandy!" He turned to his matey. "Here, you body louse, give the toff a cheroot. What's more, give him some English water and the gin bottle. All right, my young Prince of Wales! Throw your carcass into that grasshopper chair there. Ain't afraid of scorpions, are you? Look at me! I pick 'em up. Damn him, there goes his tail! Pin prick—that's all for you!" He threw a hideous little creature from him, and squashed it on the table with the palm of his hand. "Their poison don't harm me—no more'n a little exhilaration, you might say. Don't stare! Never stare at ole Grimsby! Or is it the sun's got you?"

"You notice I came without a hat," the young fellow admitted. "Yes—that gin and soda will go well."

"What's your name?"

"Gregory Ross."

"Where are you bound for?" Grimsby checked himself, grinning blackly. "No—it's no use askin' you that. You ain't bound nowheres. If you so much as set foot in the village, you'll be torn to bits."

"I found that out already," said the other.

"And if you figure you can beat it along the elephant trails up into the khuds, and over the ghats to the presidency, you're mistaken. Any herdsman as sees you will knife you and take your rottin' corpse to the Gaekwar for a reward—one hundred jinglin' rupees!"

"This seems to be a pretty good country to stay out of," Ross remarked.

"A bit of truth to that, my cocky! Good to *stay* out of, but impossible to *get* out of, you might say. You're here. A hundred rupees for your body—that's the best you can hope for; and a thousand, if you're took alive. How does it sound, me lord? That's it—a good swig. You'll be feelin' spry, for all your swimmin' about among devilfish and sharks, and walkin' in the open without a topee. Lucky for you it was only dawn, or the sun would have had you on your back, with the pariah dogs chewin' your ears and nose off!"

Ross was silent in thought. His cheroot—or the business of fingering it and puffing at it—calmed him. He looked at Grimsby's mouth, which, because of the betel nut, seemed to have received a smashing blow, sufficient to bring blood. With an aversion to sitting there in silence and facing the man, Ross exclaimed:

"I *will* get out! There's bound to be a way. What's the matter with my hiding in the sal forests up there and trekking over to the presidency?"

"A matter of a hundred miles through jheels and swamps—that's all," Grimsby chuckled. "If you don't go crazy, you'll get a fever. If you escape that, you can't find your way out anyhow. It's too thick with doob grass, creepers, vines, and such. I've tried it. There are elephant trails—it's the only way to get through that blasted wilderness; but the lousy ole tuskers travel those trails likewise, you know."

Ross swore—at himself, at the irony of his situation, at the huge joke that fate had played on him. He tossed off his glass and joined Grimsby in laughing at his own desperate plight.

"I suppose this Gaekwar of yours watches the river pretty carefully," Ross said. The other nodded. "Well, confound it all, I'm satisfied! I came here to my own funeral. I'm a discard. I haven't told you the truth of the whole matter yet. You got me off my chump; but it's this—*I don't want to get out!*"

The other's red eyes bulged.

"I say, look here, me lad! What sort of hanky-panky is this, anyhow? What happened to you that you was found swimmin' about in the blasted ole Arabian Sea, I'd like to know?"

"Nothing happened—that is, it wasn't an accident. I jumped in—that's the answer. I was sick of being an under dog to the civilization out there." He pointed indefinitely toward the west. "They threw me over, you might say, same as Jonah was thrown over. I don't mean literally. They discarded me, but I jumped in of my own accord."

"What ship?"

"Shah Jehan, of the Bombay Red Star."

"Crikey, but that's a bit of all right! Jumped in, by God! Ain't even afraid of sharks! A discard, are you—a man with your proportions? A man what can lick fifty natives with your bare paws! A man what stood up ag'in' the Gaekwar's army, as my matey calls it! Well"—Grimsby shook his head—"well, my cocky, what are you goin' to do now that you've gone and throwed yourself into—into the discard, as you calls it?"

"I asked for you," Ross said. "I thought perhaps, being of my race, you might—"

"I might what?"

"Well, confound it, I'm no beggar. All I want is protection."

"You're askin' me for help, my young toff, just the samey—eh, what? Don't deny that!"

"Very well—since I'd be torn to pieces if I set foot outside of this bungalow, I'll admit it, confound you! I'm asking you for help."

"But why should I help you?"

Ross stared, thunderstruck.

"Jove, what sort of a beast are you, anyway? I suppose you'll call my coming here to hide an imposition. I have no means of paying my board, I will set you straight on *that!*"

"But you've come to camp here, just the same! Why should ole Grimsby let a bloomin' Englishman come and live off him?"

"I say, I thought you were an Englishman yourself!" Ross shot back hotly. "I thought you were white! I came to you as one white man would naturally come to another of his race."

"You've made a mistake," Grimsby retorted. "I ain't white. I'm a yellow-livered rat!"

Ross leaped to his feet. He started, his hair waved back by a swish of the punkah. His hand went up, as if to protect his eyes from some attack, as of a vulture. Then he saw the huge, flabby, pyjama-clad thing that was grinning at him. Almost under his breath he managed to say:

"For God's sake, man, *what* are you?"

"By that you mean, I suppose, what is my business?"

Ross did not repeat it. Whatever the business was, it was apparently something to be hidden back there in the festering seclusion of those gloomy verandas, those rotten mushroom walls, those bat-haunted shadows.

"No, you needn't tell me. It's all written in your face. Crime couldn't poison you any more. You're immune, because it's already poisoned you so much—just like those damnable scorpions of yours. I know the business you're in. I could put it in one word, and—"

Grimsby interrupted.

"Since there ain't much likelihood of your ever gettin' in touch with the inspector general or any of the district police," he jeered, "I may as well tell you—"

"You need not tell me. Murder is your business!"

"I mightn't have used just that word. I might have said I'm a special executioner for the Gaekwar, or something of that sort; but your way of puttin' it is clear. Yes, that's my business. Now do you ask me for help? Sure you do! You ain't an out-and-out balmy—not you! Why go into the sunlight and get sunstroke? Why go down to the village and get shot like a dhole dog? Why go into the stinkin' jungle and rot away with a fever? You got *me*—that's why! I'm goin' to save you, too. Sit down and listen. Mind you, I wouldn't do it without pay—not Grimsby; but you can pay me—yes, siree! Not with the coin of the realm, perhaps, but with somethin' better—your own strength. You're the best specimen I've seen in Pangal since I came here thirty years ago. Can't say the same for me, can you? No—most likely I'm the *worst* specimen you've ever seen in your life."

Ross was still staring at him, wondering how so much of crime, lust, and cruelty could be written on one face.

"God, man!" Ross cried. "I'd rather go out there to my death than touch your hand in any compact!"

The other guffawed, then spat red juice.

"Might you have heard of a sect that was wiped out of India fifty years ago—thugs, they called 'em? In that happy family they had what they called master murderers—the gang murdered all victims regular. Them master criminals you calls burkhas. Each one has his pupil, and the pupil you calls a kubula. In those days a kubula had to be a gravedigger, which was his next step upward, and then you calls him a shumsia. Mind you, all that there truck is done away with now. There ain't no thuggery in India no more. It's just plain—"

"Plain murder!" Ross put in.

Again Grimsby spat, clotting the floor with red.

"I notice you ain't squiffy about the word—not a bit of it. All right! It 'll help lots if you ain't. Now look here, Mr. White Man, here's my proposition to you. You become my pupil—which makes you immune from the Gaekwar's bloodthirsty carryings-on. You become a respected citizen of Pangal, automatically, as you might say. Half a minute, now! Goin' to fly into a tantrum, ain't you? Goin' to swank around callin' me names, while I set here and blush? I ain't askin' for no opinion—not yet so soon. I'm just puttin' the problem up to you easy. You'll have a nummet to eat first, afore you answer. You're faint from your ride up the river, and your fight, and the sun. Can't give a logical answer on a bit of gin. You need some egg salan to settle your belly, and some tea — eh, what? No—don't answer me. Think it over. If you leave here, ten to one you'll be rottin' under a tamarind to-night. That's one possibility. The other is to—well, all you need do is to shake me hand. That's the other possibility. Take your choice!"

Ross stepped back. He fell into the grasshopper chair as if the thick, warm air churned by the punkah had actually blown him down.

Grimsby chuckled, the red juice bubbling at the corners of his discolored lips as if he were gurgling in his own blood. His chuckle developed to a roar. He clapped his hands for his matey.

"Here, you bandicoot, you body louse, you poochi! Out with you to the go-down! Some rum and chota hazri for this—this gentleman!"

IV

When first coming up the black river on the sea tide, Gregory Ross had had the definite impression that he was entering another world. Misgivings had taken hold of him. There was the coast reaching out in promontories on either side, encircling him, drawing him into itself, as the catamaran floated on the tide.

The river smelled hideously of dank ooze. It was stagnant water fighting against the salty current. Its color, at night, was as smooth and black as jet, except where the moon lit its reaches with a long path of red, and where the paddles of the fishermen churned up a greenish sea fire.

Crossing the swampy delta Ross had had the feeling that he was entering a world of unreality; and there was the concomitant illusion that he was making himself unreal—a lost shadow merging into a land of shadowy things.

Now he sat at chota hazri, opposite a thing of very definite and ill-savored corporeality—Grimsby Sahib.

The chota hazri, of course, gave Ross the consciousness of possessing a body as well as a soul. He was calmer, he thought more clearly, his hallucinations vanished. He remembered that he was on the coast of the Arabian Sea. He was in a secluded Hindu principality. He was talking to a criminal. He was aching in every bone and muscle from a scrimmage with a crowd of soft-bodied natives. Otherwise, he was in excellent health, but there was a price of one hundred rupees on his head.

"What the devil does this bloodthirsty Gaekwar want of me? I would like to know that!" Ross said, as he finished his breakfast.

Grimsby snapped out the answer very readily:

"Don't like Englishmen."

"Yes, that may be," Ross admitted; "but how can a savage like that go on with his crimes under the very nose of the imperial government? If it were ever found out that I dropped in here, so to speak, the government would make short work of him, I wager!"

"The ole snipe makes sure, first, that it won't be found out," Grimsby replied. "Always tells his ragtag troops not to shoot a white man, but to bring him to the palace. Cheesy old tumble-down place that palace is, I'll tell you! There's a jail-khanna attached, and he's always got it packed with diseased prisoners. No matter what your answer to my proposition is—no, don't hurry, you've got plenty of time to think it over—no matter, I say, what your answer to my proposition is, you'll land at that palace sooner or later. Not in the dirty ole dungeon—no; but you're going to meet the ole jackal himself. That can't be gotten out of."

Ross was wondering just how a feudatory robber like this Hindu potentate could go on existing. Surely his acts could not escape the inspector-general or the district police in the near-by states! But it seemed, according to Grimsby, that the British had lost touch with the principality, and had lost interest in it, too. The Gaekwar's dominions were not productive. The silted channel swallowed up money. The French had lost crores of rupees in trying to keep it open.

Then the Sanitary Department had failed to clean the place. It was impossible to do so, because of the fervent religious attitude of the Gaekwar and his people. Cholera was rampant the year around, and few white men could stand the fevers in the upper reaches of the Pangal River basin. A pesthole—that's all you could say of the whole state.

There was also a treaty with the neighboring Mohammedan state, Caligat, which prohibited the export of salt, hemp, coir, and indigo through Caligat territory. Thus the Gaekwar's land was cut off from the British, useless, untenable.

"Then there's the vile temper of the ole gent himself," Grimsby went on. "That's what you've got to shy at. The ole boy's got a down on any white man, but on them as he calls Britishers in particular. Why? I'll tell you why. His son was condemned to death by a presidency magistrate, and for a deed which was holy enough, I'll tell you—that is, in Hindu eyes. He offered his daughter for sacrifice, or something of that sort. A religious bunch, the whole lot of 'em, burnin' up with zeal and righteousness. They'd do anything for a few million years of sanctification in the hereafter. Murder weren't nothing in their eyes; but it was in the eyes of the British magistrates. They executed the Gaekwar's son—his only son, too, I understand. Had plenty of daughters, the ole Gaekwar did, but only one son who was honorably born, as they say. To kill his son meant worse than killin' the ole boy himself. The son is needed to get these here blacks into eternal bliss—after death, you understand. Sraddha ceremonies, they call 'em—the son must perform 'em and save his dad from hell's fire. Well, sir, ever since the old Gaekwar heard of the British legally murderin' his boy, he swears he'll murder any Englishman, or any white man, as comes within his grasp."

Grimsby counted on his stubby, crooked fingers the number of victims within his memory.

"More blasted Englishmen than I can count on me two hands!" he concluded. "All tucked away without complications, too—that's the joke. Blames his robber caste and that sort of thing."

He stopped talking as his eye, riveted all this while on Ross, caught the change of emotions on the young man's face. One thing was apparent—his listener was not interested in the old Gaekwar's history. He was weighing other matters in his mind—matters that had taken on the importance of life and death.

"Look here, me lad—get what I'm tellin' you afore I go on—and afore you go jumpin' at too sudden conclusions. This here Gaekwar is a fanatical sort of bloke, remember that. Do you want to have a go with him, or with *me?* Me, now, Grimsby by name—I'll learn you a thing or two about life."

"About murder, if that's what you call life!" Ross muttered paradoxically.

"Come, now! Afore you answer, let's go out and have a look at the blasted jungle—the stinkin', steamin' hole that it is. There's a chance for you! You might make up your mind then. Come on—we can see it from the lower veranda. It starts just beyond my compound."

They had stepped out into the warmer air beyond the tatti curtains. The calling of the crowd grew more clamorous, with a raucous *obbligato* of parrots screeching, but they were still far removed from contact with the sun.

"Step down here. Don't be afraid!

Scorpions don't pinch through them cricketing shoes. Feel the hot air on your face, do you? Yes, that's what you're bumpin' into, if you try that jungle! There's cobras there a plenty, and very likely you'll bump into a gunda elephant, which won't be any more comfortable, either."

Ross looked down the steep cut below the veranda. The immediate foreground had apparently been a quarry at one time, and the naked sandstone fell away like a precipice for several hundred feet. Below, the ooze beds of the river sent up clouds of foul mist. At almost regular intervals, as if a fleet of war canoes had been beached where the ooze and muddy water merged together, crocodiles basked. From their cavernous throats there came an occasional distant bellow like a bull's.

" Swim across that, if you've a mind to!" Grimsby suggested.

As a matter of fact, Gregory Ross was already considering that very move.

" If you gave me a topee to protect my brains from the sun—"

" Ah, me lad! A topee!" the other laughed. " Of course I'll give you a topee. I'll even give you a pair of shoes, so's your feet won't be cut with that there tiger grass. Mind you, I ain't keepin' you here prisoner. Nothin' like that! The jungle's keepin' you. The Gaekwar's keepin' you; but Grimsby's offerin' you freedom — freedom which will mean one day of life, or maybe two, but no more."

" You said you'd wait for my answer until I was in my right mind," Ross said sharply. " Well and good—I'm in my right mind now. Your chota hazri has set me up. The sun's not hitting me. Yes, I feel it scorching my face, even under this thatched veranda; but mentally I'm in good trim. You ask me whether I wish to die or to become your accomplice in crime—just what it is I don't know, but hideous it must be—thuggery, at any rate. Your kubulas, as you call them, steal their victim's money, kill him, and divide the rupees with you—and of course the old Gaekwar gets his share. I know the business. It works in many countries."

Grimsby seemed delighted.

" Damme if you ain't as sharp as a steel trap!" he cried. " You've got the whole scheme worked out! Yes, I'm a scoundrel. So's the ole Gaekwar himself, and—"

" And I'm to become one, if I want to save my life?"

The other nodded.

" Trust yourself either to ole Grimsby, or to that." He waved toward the stench-ridden jheels, the swamps, the black jungle radiating its poison and heat through a blanket of yellowish mist.

Ross had definitely decided what to say; but he was feeling for his words. He had never in his life been confronted by a problem of such overpowering significance. Despicable, wretched, unsavory as the hulking brute Grimsby was, he had succeeded in bringing events to a point of the most clearly defined honor. It was surprising that a gin-sodden, rotten hulk of refuse like Grimsby could actually be bartering in so great a commodity as a man's soul.

And yet that was just what was happening. Ross could not blurt out his answer in ordinary words. They would seem utter nonsense. He couldn't speak to a drunken tramp like this:

" I prefer death!"

On the other hand, he could not shout him to scorn with—

" Damn you for a murderous, filthy scoundrel! Do you think I'll dirty myself by so much as touching your hand?"

That would perhaps have been the best language for the occasion; but Grimsby had him more or less down. If Ross expected to strike out for the jungle, he must not take this man's ill feeling with him. Perhaps just a polite refusal would do.

" Hang it all, old chap, I can't do this thing! If you're going to make me join a band of thieves, I might as well refuse and have a go with the crocodiles!"

During this rumination Grimsby himself was pouring out a flow of conversation in the young man's ear. Part of it Ross heard as a foul, sinister undercurrent to his own thoughts.

" Once you join me, you're protected. The Gaekwar will have to pass on you, of course; but I can guarantee the ole bloke 'll be impressed with them ripplin' muscles."

Grimsby reached out, as if to touch Ross's bare arm. The latter was conscious of shrinking.

" You understand, me lad, you won't be a full-fledged member of the band, not at first—not until you've done your first little job, you know?"

The fellow grinned affably—so affably that the red betel juice dripped from his mouth to his unshaven chin.

" Your first job—ah, yes! Let's get to

that now. Don't want to take no promises from you, and then be given the chuck because you've lost your nerve. I want everything done aboveboard. You listenin', or are you still feelin' squiffy about them crocodiles?"

Ross looked at him.

"Go on," he said.

The other weighed the matter carefully, as if uncertain whether he should force the youth to join his band before enlarging too much upon the duties of its members.

"I got ye taped—that's certain," he said; "so much taped that I'm wonderin' how I can make it easy for you."

"Confound it, I've made up my mind!" Ross blurted out.

"Half a jiffy, now! Half a jiffy!"

Grimsby knew that the young fellow had already determined to refuse him.

"Drat the fool!" he muttered to himself. "Swells around here stickin' up his morality in my nose! Thinks he'd sooner die! Drat him!"

They stared at each other in a rage, like two animals, with fires burning in their eyes. The older man seemed to be the more catlike. He whispered huskily:

"Give me your hand!"

"No!" Ross cried. "I'm going—"

"You ain't goin' nowheres—not till I've told you what I want of you!"

Ross did not answer. He paced the length of the veranda, felt the sun like a blast on his face, and returned, pacing to the northern edge of the thatched portion. There the breath of the jungle swept up to him again. Minahs chirruped, and again he heard the bellowing crocodiles; and to those sounds Ross was always aware of a foul, smooth vocal undercurrent.

Grimsby was talking, rapidly, huskily, punctuating his sentences with suckings at the betel nut, and with expectorations of the blood-red juice.

"Your first job—that's where we were at. Now then!"

He sat down on the edge of the upper veranda, while Ross paced up and down, bareheaded, on the lower porch, gazing through the shimmering strata of heat outside, like a tiger glowering through the bars of his cage.

"'Tain't murder—no. I told you we don't have our kubulas murder nobody. We have 'em *bury* the deceased, but we don't have 'em do the actual snuffin' out. My gang's run accordin' to the best approved methods of the ancient thugs. You're a pupil—that's all; but, bein' you ain't a native, I'm trustin' you have a bit of common horse sense. I'm goin' to trust you with a job which I ain't dared trust to no natives. They just as soon throw their turbans around some black balmy, and choke him to death; but when it comes to dealin' with whites, they get into a funk the last moment, and bingo, everything's crabbed!"

He went on talking, raising his voice and letting it fall again, as Ross paced by him, reached the end of the veranda, and returned.

"He's a planter," the fellow was saying. "Held his land ever since the French days—just over the Ghats there."

He pointed over the tiled roof of the godown where his provisions were kept. In the remote east, under a glaring sky, Ross had a vision of a jagged mountain range.

"Them's the Ghats—the Western Ghats. They run all up and down India. Plenty of jute and indigo up there. This bloke is a planter—a Frenchman. That's why he's alone and on the frontier, you might say."

Again Ross got almost out of earshot, waiting at the veranda edge, looking across the compound to that black jungle rim. When he returned, the scoundrel was still jabbering on.

"He has nothin' to do with the British. He's had trouble with them, and he's unprotected. He's a damned Frenchman. You—an Englishman—wouldn't object to havin' a go with a stink like him? Of course not! You'd damned well do him up, I know! All the Englishmen hate him—traders, missionaries, dispensary doctors. They won't set foot in his pest-ridden compound. Blowzy ole stink—been gettin' rich with his plantation—lives there like a hermit, except for a couple of black wives; and he has a daughter by a regular wife. The regular kicked off—cholera. The daughter grows up to be somewheres about seventeen years of age."

Ross passed him again.

"Lives there like a hermit—Frenchman—daughter—seventeen—"

Random phrases caught the young man's ear. He was still gazing across that brown, sluggish river and at the crocodiles. He must go sooner or later and throw his life into that foul river; but before he did that, there was something in Grimsby's talk that should be listened to.

Ross paced down the length of the veranda to where Grimsby was sitting, spitting betel juice. A disagreeable odor left by mice and bandicoots could be detected in the vicinity of Grimsby himself, and seemed to be a part of him.

"You heard that, did ye?" the fellow roared. "That Frenchman's been figurin' on sellin' his daughter off for the past five years. When she was a little chit of twelve, a half-breed East Indian falls for her. That's the way with these blacks. The wedding ain't right unless the bride's ten and the groom's seventy. The rich ole varmint would give anythin' for her. She's somethin' to look at, too, I'll tell you! No, we ain't after the Frenchman's money. He's a skinflint, and has it stowed away in a bank over in Pondicherry. Miser, they say. Treats the daughter rough, too. Lowdown stink that he is! Black wives—get that? Wheat-colored wives — they might pass, dependin' upon your taste; but them Todas! These drunk Frenchmen ain't satisfied without the woman's as black as an aborigine."

For the first time Ross entered into the conversation.

"But the girl—is her blood—"

"Half French, they tell me. The mother was a poor unfortunate—English. French and English—hell of a combination, I'll say!"

"You're going to bring her into Pangal—kidnap her?"

"That's the word—to save her from bein' sold in marriage, you know; but you don't have to do it. I can get somebody else to turn the trick. I'd like to have a white man, though. You could get into the plantation, you see."

"So you're enough of a scoundrel to abduct an innocent woman like that—and right out of her own home!" Ross said.

The other burst out in a jeer.

"Her home, you say? Her home, is it? You blasted young softy! What sort of a home do you call it, I'd like to know? Why, look here—I'll tell you why I'm in such a hurry about the whole bally job. Before the month's up, the Frenchman's goin' to marry her off to that rich East Indian—a bloke who owns a few mountains of teak forests and such. He's a half-breed, as I told you, with more than a touch of the tar brush—about eight annas to the rupee, which means half and half. We're white, ain't we? We're fightin' for the purity of our own race, ain't we? We're doin' a fine thing—that's how I takes it. Savin' her from—"

Grimsby stopped without finishing the sentence. He saw a change come over the face of his listener — a change which a scoundrelly old psychologist like Grimsby could interpret very easily, although he was aghast at the suddenness of what had happened. He had had the feeling, scarcely a minute before, that he was dealing with adamant, with a character that could not be bent, with a resolution that was immutable; and now, suddenly, he saw that he had won his victory.

"You don't mean—look here, young blood, think it over well! If you join me, there ain't no return. Double-cross me, and you'll get a poison thorn in your neck, no matter if my men have to trail you to Lunnon itself. Once you're in, you're in, and that's an end to it. You're no great shakes at the business of murder—I can see that; but you can do it, with them clear eyes of yours, and that strength. What? I don't want to truck with you unless you calls yourself Grimsby's shop-mate from this moment on. Eh, what? My hand! Damme, there you are!"

He looked down at Gregory Ross's outstretched hand. They clasped, and the old renegade felt the thrill of the young man's strength, buoyancy, and determination. It went into his blood like a current.

They gripped for a moment of silence, and the compact was sealed.

V

Some sort of a cattle fair was being held in Pangal that day, and it had enticed many of the cowherds and ryots from the inland hills, besides many headmen of the surrounding villages. The old Gaekwar remained aloof from all festivals, but in the great dallan of his castle he entertained the headmen and the petty rajahs and functionaries of the neighboring municipalities.

The dallan was a high-ceilinged room, with walls covered with idols. The officials and priests, with their caste marks, merged into the group of man-sized idols, making a barbaric assembly, subservient to the patron goddess Kali—Kali the bloodthirsty, Kali the snake-adorned, Kali, dripping with blood.

The spirit of this terrible divinity pervaded the scene. The civilization of the Gaekwar's little principality was deeply rooted in her cult, in the rites of human sacrifice and of demonology. The demons of the aborigines had been incorporated in the Pangal pantheon by marriage with Krishna, Siva, and other Hindu gods. Like the Hinduism of many other states, the religion of Pangal was a heterogeneous cult of devil worship, caste savagery, suttee, and human sacrifice.

It was into this scene that Gregory Ross was introduced. Grimsby had informed him that once he was presented to the Gaekwar as a kubula—a pupil of the murder clan—he would become a citizen of Pangal, and would no longer be regarded as an Englishman. The price would be removed from his head, and he would, in a word, be immune to the bloodthirstiness of the Pangal gods as well as that of the old prince.

The Gaekwar had heard of the experiences of this adventurous white man—a young fellow who had successfully resisted arrest, a man of athletic build and good fighting instinct. Why, some day—so the old Gaekwar mused to himself—he might be the man to take Grimsby's place.

Of course, the novice must be properly taught. He must be made a stanch supporter of the Gaekwar's principles. His religion mattered little. The prince had both Mohammedans and Parsees in his civil service, and many of his soldiers were Sikhs. Faith in reincarnation was of no consequence to murderers. It was the murdered, the old ruler opined dryly, who had to worry about the hereafter.

Ross had been brought to the palace through the rear gate of the royal compound, which was shaded by a little grove of tamarinds and palms. There was nothing there that suggested royalty. There was, it is true, an old brougham, drawn by four ragged little tat ponies—evidently the royal coach. In one corner of the yard a pile of tael tins of opium and a lot of empty five-gallon kerosene cans marked the edge of the grove of trees. Just behind there was a keddah, with the Gaekwar's herd of elephants.

One of these elephants had invited Ross's particular attention—an undersized freak, reaching scarcely to a man's shoulder. A bombo acquainted Grimsby and his companion with the fact that this elephant—an ill-tempered dwarf of the mierga class—was to be shot. The only trouble, so the bombo remarked, was the government law that elephants are not to be killed unless condemned by the British.

Grimsby laughed.

"The blasted ole Gaekwar finds it awkward to do away with an elephant, but not to kill an Englishman. A wily ole rogue, I'll tell you, me lad! Penny wise, you might say. Curries favor with government by observing these petty laws; but when it comes to offering a baby girl for sacrifice, he gets away with that sort of thing!"

The compound walk led them on past a stagnant well and a plot of burned grass where there were bantams, chickens, and peacocks.

"But don't be afraid of the old cutthroat," Grimsby went on. "He'll accept you — that's certain. He wants a good white man for his business. If he don't like you, he'll hand you over to them ragtail chuckers-out of his. They'll make short work of you—poison, generally; but the chances are a hundred to one the ole boy will cop hold of you as a champion. If he accepts you in the clan, he'll give you a token in there before his rajahs and relatives. When they see him givin' you a token, they understand you're to come and go as you please. No more knifin' or mobbin' or throwin' stones at you! You're safe in this here state, no matter what you do."

They walked on toward the granite elephants beside the doorway. The troopers, writer baboos, and holy men stood aside. Grimsby seemed to be a personage of recognized importance. A sipahi even saluted him—quite a royal reception.

"One thing I want to warn you about, me lad," Grimsby said, out of the side of his dripping mouth. "This here token I'm speakin' of—the Gaekwar won't give you nothin' without you asks for it. Bally nonsense, this native way of doin' things! He'll let you choose a gift, and then it's up to you to look about and pick somethin' for yourself. That's the Hindu way; but this ole boy is peculiar. If you pick out somethin' as costs too much, he'll give it to you; but watch out for him! He'll get it back—that's his way, the ole jackal! Got a name all over South India for that little pet trick. Offers anything in his blasted ole kingdom, as he calls it, and then, if the gift is too big, what does he do but have the pore fool killed, so's he can take the gift back again! Crikey, but he's a hard un! Watch out—that's all!"

This was Ross's preliminary introduction to the Gaekwar. He went into the dallan, accompanied by Grimsby, and the crowd of rag-tag soldiers immediately crowded aside to let the two white men pass.

It was a hall into which no outer light could penetrate. Its walls and idols seemed hewn out of a granite hill. It was illuminated by oil lamps and a few smoky chirags. A palm leaf mat a yard wide extended down its whole length, some hundred feet or so, leading to the armchair in which the aged Gaekwar sat.

The prince was a dry, cruel-looking vulture. A turban, set on one side of his head, covered thin white hair, which fell in straight strands to his hunched shoulders. His coat and trousers were of red silk. His thin shins were lost in a pair of great riding boots. From under his bushy white eyebrows ratlike eyes glared at the approaching guests.

Ross felt as if a change had taken place in every fiber of his being. Here he was whirled by circumstance into the vortex of a barbarous scene, merging into it, body and soul. He experienced the elation of senses common to a neophyte who is suddenly converted to a new faith. Perhaps it was the drowsy air, pungent with the smell of goor, of burning kerosene oil, of sweating humanity. He could scarcely breathe.

It was not a scene of splendor, except the splendor that comes with any illusion of unreality. The Brahmans were shadowy beings with thickly painted foreheads. The rajahs were dressed garishly in gold turbans and coats of parrot green. Then there were those hideous many-armed idols. Ross felt that his own personality was inarticulate, helpless, without volition—a sort of grotesque, ugly reflection of his once noble self.

Grimsby and the hawk-nosed old Gaekwar conversed in Telegu. The spectators were so still that you could hear the flare of the torches, the squeak of frightened bats above.

The wheezy old potentate did not smile. Whether his puckered lips denoted pleasure or cruelty, it was hard to say. He kept fidgeting with the rubies on his fingers, as a lady will turn a ring while talking. Ross was close enough to get another feminine attribute—an overwhelming suggestion of cheap cologne.

"The Gaekwar says he regrets the incident in the streets this morning, when you were waylaid by his sipahis. A mistake, he calls it."

Ross nodded, shuffling his feet in an attempt to think of an appropriate word that could be translated into Telegu; but the Gaekwar knew a little English.

"Louts!" he said wheezingly. "Silly asses!"

"He means them fool soldiers," Grimsby explained.

"Tell him they didn't hurt me," Ross said.

Grimsby exchanged a few sentences with the old prince, then turned again to Ross, who was standing uncomfortably on the papyrus mat, first on one foot, then on the other.

"His highness says it don't look as if an army could hurt you. Likes your looks—you remind him of his son. Careful now, though!" Grimsby added under his breath. "He's the hell of a puffer. You're makin' a bit of a hit, at that. Throw out your chest! Bulge out them muscles!"

Again Grimsby and the Gaekwar conversed in tones which, although very low-pitched, could be heard throughout the hall.

"His blinkin' highness says you've found favor in his sight—if you know what that means. You're accepted in the clan, in plain terms; and damme if he ain't already offered you a gift! What 'll you have?"

There was a stir in the audience. They had all heard the offer, which was given in Telegu. They had heard it repeated in English—a language which a good many of the rajahs understood.

"Choose!" It was the Gaekwar himself who essayed the hated tongue. "Anything—anything to half my kingdom!"

"Careful now there, my cocky!" from Grimsby.

But Ross spoke up readily. He had decided upon his gift before the offer.

"While coming through the compound," he said, "we saw a mierga elephant that is a discard from the royal herd. Inasmuch as I myself am a discard from society, I felt a peculiar sympathy with that flop-eared, bony little runt. They told us it was to be shot, with the permission of the British Raj. Is this beast worth anything to the Gaekwar when it is dead?"

Grimsby translated.

The Gaekwar's face twitched up to something like a whimper, and a silent, horselike laugh came from his dry lips. He answered in Telegu.

Grimsby spoke:

"He says the little bull is of no account. Even its carcass is worthless, except for the entrails, which they would give to herdsmen for their mantras and charms when staking a keddah in the jungle. As for the tusks, the Gaekwar says they might make second-grade billiard balls for his gymnasium."

"It's not too great a gift, then. I want it!" Ross insisted.

"Why will you have this broken thing—this damaged bit of goods, the Gaekwar says, when a royal gift is offered?"

"I will have this or nothing," the young white man repeated resolutely. "Broken or damaged, well and good. It is a discard, and I feel a kinship to the bally little runt."

"The Gaekwar is surprised. He thinks you're a bally ass; and by crikey, so do I!"

"Does he give me the elephant?"

The Gaekwar nodded his head, still emitting that dry jeer.

"He says the lousy runt's yourn, and good riddance; but he ain't satisfied with your request."

"Bally nonsense!" cackled the Gaekwar himself.

It seemed that the old fellow's ear remembered an English slang phrase or two. He stood up, and addressed himself in Telegu to the assembled rajahs and headmen.

"He is telling them that as a king, he will give you a kingly gift, because you are a handsome bloke—like his son, so he says. Come, now, ask him for something else. You get two tokens instead of one—lucky young rotter! But watch yourself!"

The Gaekwar stood there waiting. He was not a tall man, but he had some idea of a royal presence. He was holding out his dry and trembling claw in a gesture of magnanimity.

"I saw a dhole dog in the corner of the compound," Ross said finally. "It was chained, and a bomo was giving it a fearful thrashing. What the dog had done I could not find out, but I could see that it was just one of these pariahs, and the fellow must have had some personal grudge against it. I would like to have that dog as my own."

This was translated. Titters went through the crowd—laughter, gibbering in Telegu, Tamil, Hindustani. Rajahs, headmen, soldiers, and the Gaekwar's nephews and cousins began to take the whole ceremoney as a farce. This stranger was evidently touched in the head—probably from being without a topee that morning. These soft-skulled white men—can't a blessed one of them stand the sunlight!

The assembly felt that it was in for some sport; but the Gaekwar seemed to take a very serious view of the matter. He frowned and scratched his forehead, where a jade pendant hung from his gold-bordered turban. A pariah dog? What pariah dog? Dogs came and went, stealing refuse from the swill heaps, killing chickens, frightening the tat ponies, barking at the elephants. They were suffered to live only because of the objections to killing them; but any native who overcame his religious scruples sufficiently to stone one of the curs to death was considered a public benefactor.

"This particular dog," Ross objected, after Grimsby had explained all this to him, "was chained. He could not have been a pariah from the streets of the city. He *belonged* here. It is my wish that I may take that dhole dog with me. He looked as if he was being thrashed to death, and I can't get the picture of him out of my mind."

Grimsby translated. There was much talk. The Gaekwar looked about with a blank expression to one and then another of his counselors. It seemed that he was unable to recall just what dog had attracted the affection of this extraordinary white man. Then some one explained the matter.

Some time before the ruler had given an order that this cur should be whipped every day until it died. The beast had withstood the lash with a grim tenacity of life, even though each day his punishment grew more merciless. The Gaekwar was reminded of the fact that he had given this order because a sunnyassi had assured him that the soul of one of his enemies—an Englishman—had passed into the body of the dog.

"You're on dangerous ground, me lad. Better withdraw that request! You're mixin' in with the ole gent's religious likes and dislikes, you know."

"Withdraw, hell!" Ross retorted. "If that poor yellow cur is in for any such torture as that, I'm going to free him, if I have to kill half the army to do it!"

"By crikey, but you're a spunky boy, if ever there was one in this hole! The Gaekwar's shakin' his old chops in laughter at you. Fust thing you know, they'll all set you down as a balmy, and think you've got devils inside of you. Speak up, now!"

"But do I get the dog?" Ross asked stubbornly.

The Gaekwar nodded his head.

"You do, blime me! What you'll do with it, I don't know, nor his balmy highness, neither! He says you can have the blinkin' ole cur, and a good riddance. The elephant and the dog are yourn; but the Gaekwar wants to give you a third token of his regard, and he wants you to choose somethin' as has real value. No more discards, or you'll have 'em all down on yer head! Speak up—a bit of raiment, a watch, a pair of inlaid sandals, anything; but he won't stand for no more truckin' with a menagerie."

This time Ross thought carefully. It might be unwise to go on "trucking" with the old fanatic, as Grimsby warned. To ask for a pariah dog was of course a joke—a joke with more or less of an insult. The donor was a king, and he should be petitioned with a certain amount of dignity.

Ross looked around blankly, uncertain just how to go about this business of picking out a gift for himself—a gift that would not be ridiculous, and at the same time a gift that would not be too great a tax on the barbarian's generosity. He recalled that peculiar little habit of the Gaekwar's of presenting a gift and then killing the recipient to get it back.

At a loss, he turned to the vicious, white-haired old reprobate as if hoping to read in those little rat eyes the answer to the ticklish riddle.

The Gaekwar was a man of medium size, somewhat shrunken by his years. His silk coat wrinkled across his crooked shoulder blades. His huge artillery boots were so large and unwieldy that the whole kingly person reminded Ross of nothing so much as those well-known red, green, and yellow pictures of *Puss in Boots* of nursery days.

As the white man's eye went from the bird-of-paradise plume in the prince's turban down to the jade pendant, and thence to the coil upon coil of pearl necklaces, he found himself appraising the value of those ornaments, like a woman in a bazaar eagerly examining the merchandise with no intention of purchasing anything. Ross was attempting to set a price on every jewel, in order to find out which was the cheapest.

His eye lit upon a small ornament hanging down in the hollow of the Gaekwar's chest, hidden by the multitudinous pearls, and dulled into insignificance. It was a grotesque little head of ancient savage art, chipped, apparently, from some sort of stone that was not even semiprecious. Ross guessed that it was a bit of granite.

About the size of a pigeon's egg, it seemed to represent a severed head with tendons and ragged flesh hanging at the throat. There was no sculptured hair, but five arms radiated from the bald head, reaching outward. The whole thing seemed to be worth little more than those small ornaments crudely fashioned out of mud, and sold in the water front bazaars of Madras, Colombo, and Bombay for a copper coin.

Ross pointed to it.

"Tell him I'll take that stone trinket," he said.

Grimsby did not translate this request, but some of the bystanders had heard. The Gaekwar himself realized what the white man was pointing to, and recoiled as if Ross's finger had touched his very heart and stopped its beating.

The word spread throughout the hall. There was an ominous buzz, as if every man there feared the coming of a terrible calamity—the imminence of unspeakable destruction. There was whispering, gaping, and then cries that merged together into a concerted moan of fury and horror. The headmen and rajahs stumbled backward, pressing against the wall, as if a leper had fallen into their midst. Grimsby, the hapless Ross, and the old Gaekwar stood there, making an isolated group of three.

Then the bedlam took on a different note—something like a low roar of anger. Certain men from the crowd—they happened to be the Gaekwar's blood kinsmen, as Ross learned later—came forward uncertainly, as if in a desperate resolve to attack this unspeakable bit of filth in human form. Ross himself felt a surge of sickening air, of musk, of cologne, as they came within arm's length of him.

The Gaekwar himself raised his hand to stop them. He straightened to his full height. His face was drawn. His eyes were no longer like a rat's. They were no longer glittering little beads, but points of colorless light, showing a rim of white about the pupils. He was an astounding picture of desperation and pride. His most vital and priceless possession had been asked for—the talisman that freed him from all fear of Kali, that made him immune to death, to cholera, to the jungle mahoos; the thing that linked him with Brahma, father of the gods; the symbol of his brotherhood with Meenarchi; the gift of Krishna, darling of the Gopis. Some one had demanded *this!*

Grimsby had fallen to his knees, slinking behind Ross as if to protect himself from the destruction that he knew would come. In the crisis he slunk off, immersing himself into the whirlpool of humanity that was surging about them. Ross was standing alone before the judge.

But the Gaekwar was a king. He had made a kingly offer before all his princes, his kinsmen, his rajahs, his headmen. Never had he taken back his word. He had always retrieved his gifts, yes, if they were worth retrieving; but that was after many days, when the luckless recipient could be poisoned in a quiet and inoffensive manner. He was an old dog, the Gaekwar, who refused to learn new tricks.

"The offer was made, up to the half of my kingdom," he said in Telegu, to the assembled functionaries. "Take it!" He slipped from his shoulder the holy thread on which the trinket hung. "Let him take it and guard it as a priest guards a consecrated thing! Siva will not destroy him. Vishnu will preserve him forevermore—unless the symbol burns into his flesh. If it does not, he has the blood of the gods in his veins. If it does—well, it is of his own doing. He will perish with the torture of seventy deaths! How can I, a king, unsay what I have said? The symbol is his. Hang it about his shoulders, and may the gods have mercy on this comely youth!"

VI

Standing in the center of that foul stew of humanity, Gregory Ross felt himself ambushed by many forces. He himself was changed. He was a denizen of Pangal, a naturalized subject; and, as such, he was enslaved. Since there has been no such word as "freedom" in Indian literature for centuries, he became a slave as soon as he became a subject.

In reality, of course, he was no such thing. He considered himself a traveler who had dropped into that strange principality by a peculiar freak of fortune. The moment he got out, he would be an Englishman again. That was the actual, the other was the mental aspect—nothing more. There was no tangible evidence, even now, that he was anything less than an Englishman, except for that cursed amulet.

Yes, that amulet—a thing that had miraculously turned him into a heathen! A thing that hung about him like the albatross about the neck of the *Ancient Mariner,* condemning him to a hundred different hells! A thing that linked him with the gods and devils of the Gaekwar's barbarous Pantheon! A thing which he could almost feel burning his flesh as it hung there!

The Gaekwar had sunk back into his armchair, exhausted by his own excitement in giving away his most precious possession. The fervor with which he had spoken, as he hung the little stone about the white man's neck, had left him breathless, trembling.

The spectators in the dallan waited in a dreadful and pregnant silence. Their venerable ruler, they were satisfied, had proved himself every inch a king. He had parted with something almost as dear to him as his soul. The gift was promised, and given, because what a king says cannot be unsaid. It could not be taken back, unless—

Yes, of course, there was that one way: a custom existed in many of the feudatory states of the seaboard which stipulated that a piece of land given to a petty rajah was to be ruled over until the rajah's death, but after that the land reverted to the overlord. It was by means of this little technicality that the old Gaekwar—as Ross had heard from Grimsby—recovered his more valuable gifts. They reverted back to him on the death of the receiver. In other words, Ross was as good as condemned to death the moment that that amulet touched his breast.

After the excruciating silence, the old potentate waved his scrawny, bejeweled hand to the multitude, and, in a sudden irascible outburst of words, ordered the assembled headmen to proceed into the banquet hall and occupy themselves with dahl, mangosteens, distilled figs, bino, and nautch girls. In reality, of course, the hot-headed old fellow was inviting his guests to get out, so that he could deal with the white barbarian without being handicapped by the necessities of royal etiquette.

In a miraculously short time Ross found himself standing in the empty hall, still facing that hook-nosed, wrinkled old vulture, while about him nothing was left but the smoke of the chirags, which threw wavering shadows into the immensity of perfumed space above them.

Two others remained—Grimsby and an interpreter. The latter was a small, fat writer baboo, with silver-rimmed spectacles and a yellow caste mark smirched on his forehead.

"I wish to be left alone," the Gaekwar said, turning to Grimsby, "with my interpreter and this youth."

Grimsby's exit was characteristic. As far as he was concerned, the curtain was about to be drawn on young Ross's life. Too bad, in a way, for Grimsby could have made use of him.

He muttered a phrase out of the side of his mouth, sucking in the betel juice as it began to trickle out:

"If you get out of this alive, I'll meet you—"

He did not finish. The supposition was ridiculous. He shrugged his shoulders, wiped the corner of his mouth with his hand, salaamed, and withdrew.

The Gaekwar did not cast a glance at Grimsby's hulking back. He riveted his eyes upon Ross's chest, where the stone hung, thrown into sharp relief by the white jacket.

The writer baboo's voice, smooth, soft, without the slightest touch of accent or passion, was turned on and off like the mechanical utterance of a phonograph:

"His highness wishes to know why you have come to Pangal."

Ross thought for a moment, and then, with some difficulty, answered:

"My race judged me—weighed in the balance, as the saying is, and found wanting."

"An interesting way of putting it, so says his highness," the phonographlike voice proceeded. "Your race repudiated you? You committed a crime, then?"

"No — that is — well, yes. It *was* a crime, I suppose—to fail. Devil take it—fail is the word! A man of my strength, health, will power, ambition—to fail! Of course it was a crime!"

"I have only translated to him that you have committed a crime which in your eyes is not actually a crime. You mean to say, perhaps, that men have condemned you, but the gods have not?"

"A deuced good way to phrase it!"

The Gaekwar watched Ross for some time, his gaze going from the stone up to the youth's face. There his eyes were focused until the white man felt his forehead burn.

"Why have you preferred death?" he suddenly asked.

"Dash it all! Who said I preferred death? I threw myself away, for that's all I was good for—at any rate, I thought so then; but every man wants to live, unless to live means torture. It doesn't mean torture to me. I am free. My past is wiped away. I am strong. My spirits are like the spirits of a young horse. Death, you say? The devil of a time you'll have making me submit to death!"

The Gaekwar nodded his head when this was translated to him. As he looked at Ross, he seemed to be troubled within himself. Sadness seemed to touch him—if sadness was an expression possible to the dark vulture face, to those glittering, passionless eyes.

"You understand that all white men who come into Pangal are put to death?"

"Yes, I understood that; but, damn it all, Grimsby interceded for me, and the Gaekwar made an exception in my case, because I was to help Grimsby in his work—isn't that so? Why kill me? For this amulet, perhaps—yes, curse the confounded thing! If he wants the amulet back, it's not for me to keep it. He's welcome to it. Here, take the damnable stone!"

He tore it from his chest and held it outward. The Gaekwar understood the gesture without any need of explanation from the writer baboo. The old vulture shook his head definitely.

"Oh, of course you won't take it back! I know the reason for that. You're a king, and can't go back on your word. We have a story in our holy book—the exact counterpart of what happened here to-day—about a king who promised a gift before his lords. The gift asked happened to be something that would damn his soul—the severed head of a godly man. That was the Gaekwar's case exactly—he gave me something that would damn him in the sight of his gods. Here!" He held it out imploringly. "Take it, and have done with this bloodthirsty business!"

This time the old Gaekwar mumbled angrily between his teeth. It was like a dog giving a warning growl. Ross withdrew his hand and waited.

"The Gaekwar says you must die at the hands of Grimsby Sahib."

"What damnable nonsense is this?" Ross cried with an incredulous laugh.

"Your race—your government, the British Raj—must not be given to understand that the Gaekwar caused your death. It is so with all the white men who have been slain in this country. If Grimsby kills you, the Pangal government is absolved. Grimsby is a white man and an outlaw."

The Gaekwar put up his hand, interrupting the toneless flow of the baboo's voice. There was a silence. The old man touched his painted forehead and looked again at Ross—looked at his face, at his bare head down to his feet, and up again to his hand, which held the amulet. The Gaekwar's hard, dark-skinned, heavily seamed face, although engraved as if in hard ebony, changed. His wrinkles deepened, his lips twitched, his eyes burned. There was some strange conflict going on in the old vulture's soul.

He spoke a sentence, but instantly held up his hand, as a signal that it must not be translated. He spoke again, as if trying to give the same thought different words. Again the hand prohibited translation.

A moment of mumbling, as if only to himself, and then he arose from the chair and walked down the papyrus mat to where the white man stood. He reached out one of those bejeweled claws as if wishing to touch Ross, but withdrew it when within an inch of the shoulder. No, he could not touch an unclean heathen whose very shadow was a defilement that Mother Gunga herself could not wash away!

And yet the old man reached forward again, almost as if to totter into the youth's arms. Ross stretched them out—a needless gesture, for the Gaekwar stepped back and sank again into the armchair, overcome with excitement—or could it actually have been emotion?

Another mumbled sentence. This time the baboo translated:

" Your white race has weighed you in balances and found you wanting?"

" Yes," Ross admitted. " Those were my words."

" The Gaekwar says that *you were weighed in balances that were imperfect.*"

Ross looked up. His face lighted with amazement and incredulity.

" Is that his judgment?"

" You were cast away to die?"

" I cast myself away," Ross corrected.

" The same thing. The gods played at dice for you, and Kali won."

Ross did not answer, for he was absorbed in contemplation of the old Gaekwar's face. Yes, there was emotion there—a terrible thing compounded of sorrow and ferocity.

Then, metallic and unmoved, the translator's voice announced:

" *Such was the history of his son.*"

A pang went through Ross's heart, so sharp as to seem like a knife—a heavy knife that was cutting him down. He had the illusion of reeling, as if the mosaic floor was the deck of a ship.

The illusion passed, leaving him standing there as still as a statue, detached from any tangible plane, whirled about by strange heathen forces, helpless, a mote of dust in a monsoon. The gods were playing with him, tossing him to the brink of death, catching him back, and investing him with life. They were placing him in the center of a comic stage and assigning him outlandish, laughable rôles. Here he was in the likeness of a barbarian ruler's beloved son!

The voice of the interpreter was churning on:

" It was at your age the young prince was put to death."

Ross met the eyes of the Gaekwar again. He saw again the conflicting emotions—ferocity and hate and sorrow. The old man saw an incarnation standing before him—a white man typifying the race that had killed his son. He also saw a man whom the gods had made in the same mold as that dearly beloved youth.

He hated Ross. He loved him with a tigress's passion for its young. Love and hate, as the Gaekwar had heard from his mahatmas and sunnyassis, were not two emotions, but one.

" At your age the race that has repudiated you condemned his only son. The Gaekwar seems to see his son standing before him where you are standing," said the interpreter.

Now the old man raised his voice, talking passionately, lending a terrific and dramatic color to the droning translation:

" If his son stood before him with all fire and spirit gone from his body, he would have been pale, white, like Amritsar ivory. Thus you stand, pale, white, in the presence of the king."

The wrinkled face was convulsed. It seemed like the face of a king who has limitless power and limitless mercy.

" The Gaekwar will not harm you. Instead, he will send you upon a heroic quest, so that instead of death you will have glory."

The baboo continued translating sentence by sentence, for the old man spoke tumultuously, spasmodically.

" After accomplishing this quest, you will be free. Through the gates of the city, through the gates of the king's house, you may come and go. The gift he has given you is a kingly gift that no man can take from you."

Ross remained immovable, scarcely breathing.

" The Gaekwar himself will never covet it. He will never ask for it, nor harm you in order to recover it. So long as you wear it, you will have the privilege of the king's own blood. The king pities you as he pitied his son. May Siva Bhairava spare you! May Brahma, father of the gods, bless you! May Vishnu preserve you from this dav forever!"

VII

From the adjoining rooms Ross was aware of the muffled rhythm of the monkey drum and thigh bone trumpet, of the jingling of nautch girls' anklets, of the nasal intonation of hymns. The air, the clouds of incense smoke, the shadows, the perfumes, seemed woven together into a tangled and inseparable pattern of sound as well as smell.

Ross heard this, his senses being for the first time aware of other impressions than the conflict with the old Gaekwar. Suspense was over. The old king himself leaned backward in his chair, as if exhausted after a terrific physical combat.

The baboo wiped his glasses with the corner of his silk jacket, and waited for his master to give him another bit of translation to work out.

The Gaekwar changed his tone completely. His sentences were sharp, mordant, without the color of passion:

" Before you go upon this quest, the Gaekwar wants to know what compact you have with this Grimsby Sahib."

That was easy enough to explain; but Ross intuitively felt that he must use words carefully.

His compact was plainly this—Grimsby had agreed to free him from the Gaekwar's bloodthirstiness on condition that he should abduct a certain French girl from an indigo plantation in the mountains. Ross had agreed to do this, for the reason that the girl was to be literally sold to a wealthy merchant who was a half-breed. This was the compact that he had to explain to the Gaekwar. Obviously, his words must be very carefully chosen, for the basis of the whole compact lay in the fact that two white men—Grimsby and Ross—objected to a white girl marrying a man with Hindu blood in his veins.

Needless to say, as Ross tried to summon words in which to explain this to the Gaekwar, he found that he could not explain it at all. The Gaekwar was a Hindu, and any such compact would therefore be an insult to him.

" His majesty is impatient," the baboo prompted tonelessly.

" Very well! Tell him this—I agreed to become a disciple of Grimsby, and to do his bidding. In return for this he was to beseech the Gaekwar to let me live."

The old potentate thought this over, scratched his scrawny chin, and nodded his turbaned head, before he spoke.

" Grimsby is a very hard man," the baboo translated. " In many ways he has greater power than the Gaekwar himself, for he is white. He is a wary man, with the teeth, the strength, and also the cowardice of a tiger; and yet he is more like a gunda than a tiger, for, if he has a grudge, he will never forget it. He is therefore more dangerous than the Gaekwar, for the prince is an old man, and clings no longer to his memories and his hates."

" All this I have found out," said Ross.

" If you have made a compact with Grimsby Sahib, the Gaekwar warns you—do not break it, or your life is not worth a cowrie shell."

" I understand that, too."

" The Gaekwar asks if you are satisfied to go upon a quest for him."

" What quest?"

The translator looked over his glasses ominously.

" Shall I say you have asked that?"

" Why not?" Ross inquired.

" He has given you this choice—to go upon a quest for a king, or else to die. What matters what the quest is?"

" True enough! Tell him I'm ready. Naturally I can say nothing else."

The Gaekwar, hearing this translated, seemed definitely pleased.

" This quest has precedence over your work with Grimsby."

" Of course!"

" It is to be done immediately. When it is accomplished, you may return to Grimsby, to fulfill your compact with him.

He will send you upon expeditions of murder. This expedition is not one of murder, but of peace, of joy. It entails happiness. It entails great good. It will be a lifelong blessing both to the Gaekwar and to yourself."

Ross held his breath. He felt as if he had been transported to a scene many ages in the barbaric past. He felt like some mythical character standing in the presence of an ancient king, unreal and legendary. The quest, as it was called, could only be anticipated as something dreadful, unbelievable, compounded of the elements of savagery and myth.

The baboo went on oracularly:

"Beyond the land of Pangal, over against the presidency of Madras, there is a certain garden inhabited by devils. There, so they say, many varicolored flowers are grown—bhir flowers, garish red; white blossoms of pigeon flower trees; jhoom, honeysuckle, poppies, the blue hedge flower, the crimson dhauri. And in this garden of many drowsy perfumes and stimulating colors there is one plant which the gods have forbidden men to touch, save only those of the highest caste. It is of exquisite beauty, but it is hidden from view by the jealous gardener. It grows in no other country. It can be found only in this cleft of the hills, just beyond the Pangal jungle rim. If men of the lower castes should touch its petals, their skin will be poisoned, and they will become leprous. To a white man—so the sunnyassis say—its touch is doubly poisonous. Therefore, look you, in going upon the quest, it behooves you to be carefully instructed. You must steal into the garden at only such and such a time. You must hold the stem in such and such a way. You must pluck the flower and cover it, so that your eyes be not dazzled by its flaunting fire. All these instructions will be given to you at a certain village on the jungle rim. Then, if the gods—Siva and Vishnu, Kali and Krishna—are so pleased, you may go forth upon the quest."

"I will start to-night," Ross declared, greatly inspired by the bizarre and unbelievably romantic words of the baboo.

"There is infinite danger," the native replied. "The expedition must be carefully planned. You understand that the flower itself is of immeasurable value, and that the theft of it can only be accomplished at great hazard. Your first duty is to prepare for a journey through the Pangal jungle—an obstacle not without peril. You will go to Grimsby, the jungle sahib. You will tell him that you are sent by the Gaekwar to the mountain village called the Saddle of the Heavenly Horse, where an enemy of the prince sojourns. You may lie to Grimsby Sahib, saying that the Gaekwar has sent you to this enemy to slay him. Then will Grimsby ask no more questions, but instead, as is his wont, he will help you in your work. He will give you arms, ammunition, a shikari to guide you, and food to stay your hunger in the wilderness."

"Suppose I am successful," Ross said in a changed voice. "What then? Do I have no further reward than to give myself, my strength, my youth, to this scoundrel Grimsby? I will go on this quest, but I want to be free from Grimsby."

"To be free from Grimsby?" the baboo repeated.

"Tell my words to the Gaekwar," Ross commanded.

Hitherto the baboo had spoken smoothly, easily, without gestures, with a fine command of the Telegu tongue; but here, for the first time, he stumbled. He scratched his oily black hair, taking off his little round embroidered skullcap and twisting it nervously. He began again, went on smoothly, and bumped up against a veritable wall. Finally, stammering, puzzled, distraught, he gave up and turned to Ross.

"Free from Grimsby—those were your words?"

"Yes."

"There is no such word as 'free' in our language, sahib."

The Gaekwar impatiently rapped on the carved ebony of his chair arm.

"If you have made a compact with Grimsby, not all the gods of the Pantheon can free you," the baboo said.

The Gaekwar spoke up sharply.

"He asks, are you ready to go for this flower to-night?"

Ross stood with the same stoic immobility that he had preserved during the entire grueling catechism. He felt as if bound with unseen and unbreakable chains. They were so strong, so heavy, that he seemed to feel the weight pulling him down to his knees.

After a moment of bewilderment, he bowed his head. It was his assent.

(*To be continued in the June number of* Munsey's Magazine)

Scars

THE STORY OF A WOMAN TO WHOM FATE WAS CRUEL

By L. M. Hussey

WHEN Howard Meehan entered the room, a glance at the bed persuaded him that Julia was sleeping. The curtains of all the windows were drawn, save one, and through this one entered the unimpeded moonlight. It descended upon a patch of carpet, not as a clear, unbroken beam, but in the manner of a luminous dust, ceaselessly falling.

Quietly drawing a rocker close to the window, Meehan seated himself. In spite of his weariness he told himself that now, at last, he must resolve his tormenting problem.

Through the slit of half raised eyelids Julia watched him. She was not asleep, as he supposed, nor had she slept at all since going to bed. She had retired early only that she might be alone, and to escape a possible betrayal of her emotions to her husband and the girl.

That evening, at dinner, the restraint she put upon herself had been agonizing. To smile, and to show no sign of her inner distress, was to achieve an almost heroic suppression; for, like one in dire physical pain, her impulse was to cry out, to yield to some vocal expression of her anguish.

The moonlight wanly illumined her husband's face. Although his expression was not clearly discernible, she saw his features with enough definition to inform her that he was perplexed, and that he pondered deeply.

Julia understood. Through her perpetual want of faith, she had always foreseen this hour. Fatefully and inevitably it had come. He was making the decision whose necessity she had long previsioned. In short, he was weighing his duty to her against his newly aroused hope of happiness. As if his face were the accurate mirror of his thoughts, she watched it with a terrible avidity.

It was infinitely distressing to lie in bed so motionlessly, yet, if she stirred, she would lose this chance of divining his resolution. Twice she believed it formed, for, like one who is at last determined, he gripped the curved arms of the rocker, half rising to his feet. Each time Julia held her breath, and strained to comprehend from his expression the presumed solution; but each time he sank back upon the chair, his perplexities renewed.

At last, softly but abruptly, he rose, glanced toward the bed again, and then, moving out of the moonlight, he stepped toward the door. She heard his soft footfalls in the hall and his cautious descent of the stairs. She got out of bed and hurried to the window. Meehan, fully revealed in the moonlight, was standing on the lawn, and he was alone.

Her own face was now visible in the faint luminosity of the open window. It was a deceptive light, however, for all the little lines on her forehead and about her eyes were effaced, so that she seemed to achieve a recrudescence of her youth. Yet even the deceit of the moonlight could not cover those two bleached splotches on her cheeks, nor the smaller one between her eyes. They were constantly in her thoughts—her scars. Unconsciously she touched them with her fingers.

Her touch was the gesture of one who refuses to forget. It was another affirmation of her perpetual fear. No words of Howard Meehan had ever persuaded her that these disfigurements were negligible things. All through the years they had been an impregnable bulwark raised against her happiness.

She looked down into the garden again, and saw that her husband was still alone, although he had seated himself on one of the rustic benches. Obviously he had gone there not to meet with any one, but to pursue his cogitations.

For an instant she wished it might be otherwise. Perversely she desired that Alice might appear, keeping a secret rendezvous. Then she could reveal herself, they would understand that she knew, and this long travail of tormenting pretense would come to its conclusion.

II

It was singular that at this moment Julia and Meehan evolved a parallel course of thought, for the recollections of both reverted to the days of their first intimacy, and thereafter followed sequentially the events of their marriage.

Julia had seated herself in the chair lately occupied by her husband. In a moment there came to her one of those curious convictions that she was repeating some act out of the past—that she had sat thus before, and in a similar mood. Then she remembered how, a decade before, she had seated herself near the open window of her room in a summer hotel to ponder young Meehan's avowal of his ardor. Even then she had foreseen unhappiness, but she lacked the strength to deny him.

"I wanted him too much!" she murmured to herself.

Below, in the garden, Howard Meehan was recalling his first meeting with his wife. He had gone up to the Poconos after a difficult winter of illness—after, in fact, a protracted attack of bronchial pneumonia, which had all but ended him. He arrived at the hotel late in the afternoon, but before dark he had already made three or four acquaintances.

One of these—the elderly wife of a merchant whose business, or perhaps pleasure, kept him in the city save at week-ends—having ascertained that the young man played bridge, asked him to join a table that evening. Young Meehan was too acquiescent to refuse, although he would have preferred his freedom. There were three or four very pretty girls in the hotel, whom he had already glimpsed during the brief period since his arrival, and he was convinced that no one of them would be in his hostess's party. It would be vastly preferable, therefore, to stroll about on the grounds after dusk, on the chance of making an agreeable acquaintance; but the merchant's wife was too adroit, and captured him with very little difficulty.

Later, in the dining room, gazing across the tables at a charming face, the young man sighed. However, his optimism told him that there would be a to-morrow.

After dinner he strolled out to the lobby. Through the arched door he could see card tables being ranged along the wall in the drawing-room. He sighed again, and lighted a cigarette.

Men and women stood about in the lobby, conversing. In one corner a group of children formed a circle on the floor, where they played at jacks. None of the young girls was visible. Probably they had already gone outdoors, where they might be found seated on one or another of the wooden benches beneath the hemlocks.

Meehan's impulse was to disregard his obligations. The windows, dusky rectangles yielding glimpses of the night, were strangely seductive. However, etiquette prevailed, and he remained seated, delivered to the disposition of the card players.

Then his eyes chanced upon the figure of a woman who stood with a child at her side, reading the announcements on a yellow board near the clerk's desk. Her back was turned, and he could not see her face, but he was arrested by the uncommon grace of her figure.

Her small head, whose coils of chestnut hair glinted in the yellowish lights, was uniquely poised on a slender white neck that flowed into the slope of her narrow shoulders by an imperceptible transition. She was tall—tall enough and slender enough to suggest a willow wand, or an exquisite lily nodding a stately blossom.

The child, a girl of nine or ten, was similarly gracile. Meehan concluded that the chestnut-haired woman was her mother.

He sat watching the woman's coiled hair, in order that he might see her face as soon as she turned toward him. He assured himself immediately that her face was beautiful—a conviction that increased his desire to see it; but since she did not turn at once, he was vouchsafed a few moments for speculation.

She was alone. Where was her husband? Meehan experienced a sharp pang of disappointment when he thought of that obviously fortunate man. Then, in the plenitude of his youthful self-esteem, he smiled a small, cynical smile, thinking that perhaps the husband might not prove, in the end, so fortunate.

She turned, and Meehan's eyes fastened themselves upon her features with a shocked fascination. There were astonishment and sudden pity in his eyes as he gazed at the countenance revealed.

All the fundamental loveliness he had presumed was there, but it was strangely blotched and marred. It was as if a vandal or a madman, having come upon a beautiful portrait, just finished by the artist, had dipped the master's brush into the whites of the abandoned palette, to daub them on the painted face. Beneath the woman's eyes, on her cheeks, the delicate and living texture of her skin was displaced by flat cicatrices of bleached and parchmentlike tissue, while on her forehead a similar disfigurement interrupted the smooth modeling of her brow.

In the strange fascination of this face Meehan forgot his regrets, and ceased to sigh for possible adventure out of doors; but his avid curiosity had no more than an instant's satisfaction, for the woman crossed the lobby and entered the drawing-room. The child followed her.

Later, when the young man took his place at the card table, he found that she was one of the players. As the merchant's wife made her known to him, he strove to conceal his inappropriate interest. Scarcely glancing at her face, he murmured a few conventional words of pleasure, and, after the ladies were seated, took his place.

One fact surprised him—a refutation of his first surmise. She was not married. She had been introduced to him as Miss Worth.

During the ensuing play, Meehan experienced a succession of unusual emotions, a series of small shocks that were derived from the incongruity of Miss Worth's disfigurement. Again and again, as he watched the table, his eyes encountered her gracile white hands gathering up the cards and sorting them. As by an involuntary compulsion, his gaze passed upward along the seductive curves of her arms, her shoulders, and her throat, to her face, where it remained for a startled instant in fixed scrutiny of the lifeless scars.

These livid patches were like portions of a mask adhering to her delicately textured face. Meehan had to restrain a fantastic impulse to reach across the table, that he might pluck them off with his fingers.

When the game was over, the young man gazed after Miss Worth as she passed through the lobby, leading the child by the hand. They ascended the broad flight of stairs, and were gone; but presently the woman appeared alone.

The lobby was nearly deserted. All save a few had drifted outdoors, and Meehan grasped the opportunity to speak with Miss Worth. They chatted for a moment about the card game, and then he said:

"Shall we go outside? The moon is coming up."

They emerged together. Meehan was silent now. He wanted to ask her about her misfortune. He could think of little else, and this preoccupation deprived him of his customary fluency.

Up out of the valley ascended the moon, an enormous orange globe. The earth transpired the balsams of the pines, and somewhere in the woods a screech owl cried despairingly. It did not seem necessary to speak. Silence was more appropriate.

"One might find peace from almost anything here," the woman murmured at last.

"From what?" asked Meehan.

She did not answer; but after a while they began to talk.

III

Meehan found her reticent. She was not ready with confidences; but she accepted his companionship, and he discovered a peculiar and inexplicable excitement in her company. In the succeeding days, for this romantic and imaginative young man, to be with her was to be perpetually on the verge of some brooding mystery. He sought its elucidation in all her physical aspects—the recondite sadness of her eyes, the listless flection of her head, an instant of bitter rigidity in the curve of her lips, a habitual moment of hesitation that came to her slender hands when they gestured, as if she weighed her smallest movement.

Julia Worth was older than Meehan—four or five years older. He felt the shyness that a young man instinctively feels in the presence of a woman not too distant from his own age, but older than himself.

She seldom talked of personal concerns. Nevertheless, Meehan felt that their intimacy was steadily increasing. Sometimes they followed the mountain paths alone. Again, choosing easier routes, they were accompanied by the child, little Alice.

"The first evening I saw you," he told her, "I took Alice for your daughter."

Julia smiled faintly. There was an unceasing enigma on her lips, but Meehan already knew that Alice was the daughter of a dead friend to whom Julia frequently extended an affectionate hospitality.

"But you could not have seen any resemblance between us," she said.

"I imagined one. After all, there's a suggestion of you in little Alice—the same slenderness, a similar grace."

It was the first time Meehan had spoken so boldly. With a swift glance at her face, he watched for whatever expression his words might evoke. Her facial response was immediate — an instant deepening of color, which might evidence an emotion of pleasure, and then a slight contraction of her brows, as if in pain.

Meehan understood, and compassionately he longed to tell her that no superficial blemish could lessen the appeal of her fundamental loveliness; but what a pitiful thought for her, he mused—the self-consciousness that she was fashioned like a perfect flower that had been blighted!

"No doubt she exaggerates her defect," he thought.

But was it a defect for serious consideration? By this time, although her face was still fascinating, it in no way repelled him. His eyes had grown used to the livid, mask-like patches that overlay the delicacy of her living skin.

It was in the third week of their companionship that she told him her story.

One afternoon they had descended into the valley, through fields of blossoming wild carrot, whose pollen clung to their clothing like a white dust. Julia plucked a tiger lily and fastened it in her hair. They rested near the creek, and the hornets sang above their heads in pursuit of flies.

Meehan was looking at the flower in her hair. He reflected that this dappled, somber blossom was appropriate to the woman who wore it. Was she not as mysterious as the drooping lily? In her slow gestures and strange lethargies, was she not equally suggestive of a smoldering flame?

She misinterpreted his glances, and suddenly she said:

"You are looking at my face!" With the tips of her fingers she touched the white scars. "You've wondered about these? Then I'll tell you."

At the beginning of her recital, Meehan, in his embarrassment, sat with downcast eyes; but he forgot his embarrassment in the interest aroused by her confidence. Before she had concluded, his eyes were raised, watching her lips, as if to anticipate her words.

"He was not unlike you," she said. "Over the card table, that first evening, I watched you, because of the faint resemblance. You didn't notice it?"

She shrugged her shoulders, smiling a little.

"I didn't intend you to notice it," he replied.

Then she described more fully this man, the tragic figure in her romance of five years past.

"How bitterly I blamed him at first!" she cried. "During those terrible weeks in the hospital I used to press my hands helplessly against the bandages, and ask God to punish him for deceiving me."

She paused.

"I hadn't been told then," she added, "that he was dead."

The young man listened with an augmenting excitement. She became more mysterious with this revelation of herself. There were gaps in her story, hiatuses of romantic incident that Meehan was well able to supply from his own imagination. It was from his fancy that he reconstructed her ardors, and suddenly he profoundly envied the man who had known them.

Yet Meehan could not blame him. It was certain that he had found her irresistible; but at what a price!

She did not prolong the story. She told it, indeed, in words of a certain grave simplicity. She censured no one, but told her tale in the mood of one who believes that fortune is not of human design, but is the work of fate.

From her recitation the young man constructed a sequence of vivid images. He perceived, as if he had witnessed them with his own eyes, her first idyllic days with her lover. She must have been happy then. Looking at her, he felt that the unique quality of that first vernal felicity could never be renewed. He sensed, even if he did not fully understand, that she could never again yield herself to happiness with the same spontaneity. Her emotions, if aroused once more, would be tinctured with memories.

Then Julia described the catastrophe.

"We were coming out of the theater," she said. "I had taken Herbert's arm. We were both laughing. I called his attention to a disreputable old man standing at the curb, with a dirty hat in his hand, begging. It was just at the moment when I spoke that I felt Herbert's arm stiffen. I glanced up at his face in surprise. Then I saw that he wasn't looking at me. We both stopped. The woman was standing right in front of us."

She closed her eyes for an instant, as if to veil her sight to her recollections. Then she continued:

"I wasn't quick enough to understand. You see, I was so innocent! I had never dreamed of suspecting Herbert! I stood there stupidly, looking at that dark face all twisted with passionate hate. It never came to me at all that *I* was the one she hated. I had never seen her before. It was like a sudden, bewildering nightmare. I think Herbert spoke. I think he said something to her, but I didn't hear the words. Nevertheless, he must have spoken—I'm sure he did. If she had been hesitating, if she had been at all uncertain, the sound of his voice must have enraged her beyond endurance. She made an abrupt movement with her hands, and I saw her draw a bottle out of her muff.

"Part of this is hazy to me, and then there are insignificant details that stand out clearly. For instance, when she took the stopper out of the bottle, I knew that it was not a cork, but glass. I can still hear it tinkle as she threw it on the sidewalk. I had no idea of what was to happen. My arms were lowered, and no instinct told me to raise them. When she threw the liquid in my face, I was defenseless. Even then I didn't move. I felt nothing but a kind of oily wetness, trickling down my cheeks. It was several seconds before I was conscious of pain. With the first stinging pains I fainted. When I awoke, I came back to pain. I was in the hospital then."

She lowered her head.

"I learned no details until two weeks later. Even then I couldn't learn everything. It seems that Herbert's wife disappeared in the crowd, and that Herbert accompanied me to the hospital. Then he must have gone to her apartment. I found out that they had separated before he met me; but evidently she wanted him, and was determined that no one else should have him. Poor, unhappy, jealous woman! Herbert went to her after he had left me. God knows what he intended to do or say. The man in the next apartment had been sitting up late that evening. He heard shots, and ran out into the corridor.

"'I stood there listening for a moment,' he told me afterward.

"Then he tried the door. It was unlocked, and he went in.

"'There was a powdery smell,' he said.

"He ran to the living room, and there he saw Herbert lying face down on the carpet, and already dead. Herbert's wife was still living, and she still held the revolver in her hand; but she wasn't conscious. She died before morning."

Julia paused, and for the first time there entered into the simplicity of her recital a dark note of passion.

"But I lived!" she cried. "It wasn't intended that I should die! Why not?"

Involuntarily young Meehan seized her hands, pressing them tightly in his own.

"What a bitter thought!" he exclaimed. "You must not say that! How terrible, if you had been a victim also!"

His earnestness, so spontaneous and so sincere, moved her. His fingers, gripping her own so tightly, gave her a seductive sense of weakness, which she suddenly longed to yield to his superior strength.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

The young man's eyes had fallen to her white arms, and to the slender wrists about which his fingers curved. In spite of everything, she was lovely! The scars were effaced, and he could see her features in all their previous perfection.

Nevertheless, he pitied her. Even then, pity was mingled with the ardor that stirred in his breast. Half with commiseration and half with passion, and with a further sense of her mystery, he drew her toward him.

"Because I love you!" he said.

She wanted to free herself, for a terrible fear of the future possessed her; but she had not the strength to deny him. She had not the strength to deny her own want. Scalding tears brimmed her eyes as he kissed her.

IV

Now Julia sat in the moonlight, reviewing the past, and thinking how bitterly accurate had been her foresight of the present.

From the moment of her cruel wounding, the scars had covered not only her face but her heart. At no time, even in her happiest hours, had she been able to evoke a sufficient intensity of illusion to make her happiness complete; but even in spite of her doubts, in spite of her sense of fate, she might have put off the calamity. She need not have brought it upon herself just now. She herself had summoned it, had called it to her own doors, when she had asked Alice, after the girl's five years in Europe, to pay her a visit.

Her lips parted, and she murmured aloud:

"But I thought of her as still a child!"

She reviewed the awakening of her suspicions, less than a week ago. She recalled the day—a day when she had been ill. She herself had persuaded her husband to take the girl for a drive alone.

"The poor dear is bored to death," she told him. "Entertain her for an hour or two. If I lie down for a while, I'll feel better."

She could see once more his curious hesitation, which had not been significant to her then. He shrank from this chance. Already he must have been afraid. Now Julia was amazed at her own blindness.

Why had not her ever present doubts prompted her perceptions? Why had she been too dull to see that the young, sweet charm of Alice was already calling to Howard Meehan in a soft but terribly compelling voice?

He had resisted it—that she knew. He had striven, against the allure of that young face, to keep a grip upon his fidelity. No matter what happened, she could never despise him. There was nothing cheap or common in his emotions. He, who was still young, had felt the strong call of youth to his own youth—the call of an untainted, an unblemished youth, and yet, in spite of this, she knew that he had struggled before he yielded.

On that day of her awakening Julia lay in her bed and heard the roar of the starting motor, and its diminishing purr as Howard and the girl drove up the road together. Later she rose and went outdoors. She sat on the lawn, waiting for them to return. She thought of little Alice as she had been years before, a child.

She smiled as she thought how Howard, in the beginning, had mistaken the child for her own daughter.

"The same slenderness—a similar grace!"

The memory of his words brought forth a sigh. Her own grace was departing, but, as if Alice were indeed her daughter, it was renewed in the young girl.

Then, raising her eyes, she saw the motor descending the hill. It swung into the drive. Her husband leaped from his seat and held out his hand to the girl. At that instant Julia looked at Alice's face. It was radiant!

The vision of those widely opened eyes, of those parted lips, of the glow in those cheeks, renewed itself so vividly that Julia sprang from her chair, and, moving out of the patch of moonlight, stood motionlessly in the dusk. Her resignation to a necessary fate departed. Nothing was inevitable!

Drawn half by a purpose and half by a malignant fascination, she moved toward the door and out into the hall. She must see at once the sleeping countenance of her antagonist, that she might measure her strength.

Noiselessly she turned the knob of Alice's door. It opened without a sound, and Julia entered the room like a ghost. The moonlight, reaching across the bed, fell upon the sleeping face, half turned to the pillow.

A braid of golden hair, pale as flax in the moonlight, lay curled over the girl's neck, which palpitated gently as she breathed. Her lips were closed, but, since they were faintly pouted, she seemed to be whispering.

What secrets did she murmur in her dreams? Behind those closed eyelids, with the delicate fringe that scarcely touched her cheeks, what did she see? Sleeping, her youth was the more apparent, and the older woman, looking down at her face, was suddenly immersed in a torrid current of hate and despair.

She remembered that other woman, Herbert Finlay's wife, who must have watched her very much as she, in this moment, gazed at Alice. Was not that unhappy woman her sister in emotion, one with her now in dark, despairing passion? This flaunting challenge of youth and loveliness—neither she nor that other could brook it!

With a feline stealth Julia moved toward the dressing table, whereon a pair of scissors glinted like a slender jewel. Her taut fingers closed about them, and once more she stood over the sleeping face. Why should fortune be more generous to this girl when it had been so cruel to herself? A few slashes upon those defenseless features, and the sharp blades would rip their charm away, as a veil is torn by heedless fingers!

She bent down, she poised her hand above the motionless cheeks; but in that slumbering face she saw again the countenance of the child whom she had loved. She uttered a cry.

Alice awoke from her dream. Startled, she sat up in bed, gripping the covers with her hands. Some one, she thought, had passed through the door; but the room was empty, and there was no sound.

Slowly she sank back on the pillow, and with a renewed sense of security she fell asleep once more.

V

Out on the lawn Howard Meehan strove to resolve his problem once and for all. He had thought that the presence of his sleeping wife, which he had sought a moment before in the bedroom, might restore the stanchness of his fidelity. Above everything, he loathed to hurt her. Why must he suffer in this terrible dilemma?

All the yearning and profound desire that had come to him so lately—he had not willingly aroused it. Was it a thing inborn in himself, or had it shone forth from the radiant eyes of the girl, to be implanted by her glances in his heart?

Her wide gray eyes—they were at once innocently transparent and as darkly fathomless as the depths of the distant woods toward which he turned his gaze. The spell of her youth had entangled him insensibly. The silken threads had fallen so gently upon his heart that he knew nothing until, with a flutter, it beat ruinously enmeshed in the woven web of her allure.

Yet he had not been lost until that afternoon when he drove out with Alice alone. Mentally he could reënact each detail of the excursion. Again he felt the girl's soft hand in his as she descended from the car to pluck the buttercups that grew near the edge of the road. He saw her stoop over the flowers, a larger but not less exquisite flower herself. She arose, holding a single blossom delicately between her fingers. She was close to him. She held the flower beneath his chin, and laughed at the upward reflection of the yellow light.

Had the intoxicating perfume that he scented then exhaled from the flower or from her person? No, not the flower, for that was odorless. It had been the musk of her youth, the savor of her seductiveness. She was irresistible then, nor could he any longer restrain his own impulse. She did not struggle when he kissed her. With closed eyes she received his lips, her head thrown back.

And now she was returning to the city. To-morrow she was leaving them.

Yesterday, for the first time, she had mentioned Julia, and had made her first acknowledgment of that other presence that stood between them.

"You mustn't let her know!" she had whispered.

Was this pity, or an instinctive caution? Neither, perhaps, or a blend of both. Alice was too innocent to know either the fullness of compassion or the necessity of concealment. How sure she was! How certain that Meehan belonged to her, in spite of any other's claim, and that he would follow and take her!

Her youth, thought Meehan, suddenly—its innocence was hard and unperceiving. It was an instinctive grasping for happiness, without a thought of how her felicity, and his, might thrust like a knife at Julia's heart.

"You must not let her know!"

Suddenly, with a start of cynical fear, Meehan seemed to hear the words being repeated at some future time with reference to himself. Wouldn't the time come when Alice might turn to youth, as he was turning now?

Julia—ah, happily, Julia knew nothing yet! To-morrow she might know everything. If, after Alice was gone, he found her absence unbearable, he would be forced to confess his secret. Clairvoyantly he saw Julia's pale, pitiful face go as white as the scars upon it. Was there any passion in the world, any need of youth and loveliness, that could justify him in inflicting upon her this second cruel hurt?

Meehan sprang up from the bench. At last he had decided. His commiseration had triumphed over every other emotion. Youth, he told himself, was mad, its appeal was a heady intoxicant, but that would pass, whereas the emotion that had drawn him to Julia ten years before persisted and still held him. Perhaps he had never loved her—that is, with any untainted abandon. Perhaps, in the presence of little Alice, he had felt that pagan sort of seduction for the first time; but his enduring pity was stronger than love, embodying, as it did, an imperishable affection. At last the choice was obvious and plain!

He went indoors and silently ascended the stairs.

When he entered the bedroom, he saw that Julia's eyes were open. She had moved to the edge of the bed.

"Awake?" he asked very gently.

He took her hands and pressed them. She could not move, a strange torpor possessed her, but she understood that Meehan had chosen. Something, she knew not what, had won for her!

How tired she was, how weary! She was almost lacking in the strength to be glad. Looking up at Meehan, as he held her hands, it puzzled her to see how happily he was smiling. He was happy because no new hurt had come to Julia. She did not know!

The Black Fox

THE TALE OF A WILDERNESS DWELLER ON WHOSE LIFE A HEAVY PRICE WAS SET

By William Byron Mowery

EARLY May on the Tha-anni saw the barrens clear of snow and the river of ice. Endless strings and V's of high, honking water fowl had come out of the south. Along the borders of sodden muskeg lakes, weaving rookeries were settling down, with clackering quarrels over mates and feeding grounds, to the business of brooding. The exotic growth of the poppy was variegating the barren gray with riotous colors.

The chinook that blew steadily from the south was warm and sweet-scented. Long since the traverse of the caribou had passed to the north; and the white whale herds that wintered in the bay had gone to their summer feeding grounds in boreal waters.

One May morning, on a lake-fed tributary of the Tha-anni, two fox puppies lagged behind their mother, a sly red lady who was frantically bustling her litter into her den on a sunny clay bank—the hole of an ousted marmot. The parent and the other six disappeared into the subterranean domicile; but the two puppies that were digging furiously after a mouse in a paunrat clump, two hundred yards away, refused to follow. Only that morning had they had their first taste of hunting for themselves, and the zest of it was stronger than parental warning of danger.

One of them was a red, faintly streaked with silver king hairs which told of patch blood. The other was a fuzzy little black, a rare jet from the pointed tip of his nose to the end of his brush. With his ears sharply erect, his sagacious eyes sparkling, and his head twisted sidewise, to see that the mouse did not escape between his feet as he dug, he looked innocent of the ruin which his four-figure price was to bring whichever way he turned.

It was the telltale hairs from his first three-month shedding which brought Émile Carron, the Cree breed, to dig out the den. The morning before, Carron had passed the sunny bank on his way to take up traps along his fur path. A glance at fresh bones, feathers, and rabbit fur told him of a fox with litter. He would have gone straight on, but his beady eyes caught sight of a little tuft of black hair clinging to a gnawed root.

Cunningly, disturbing nothing, he went straight on; but he took up no more traps that day. Instead, he spent the time until the next morning in sharpening digging tools and weaving a cage of heather willow. It was against the code of the fur path to destroy a female with a litter. Old men of the Cree spoke mysteriously of a Manitou law against such a killing; but Émile Carron was burning for the money that a live black puppy would bring.

When the black baby fox and his red brother were first aware of danger, the breed was between them and their den. Over his shoulder he carried a shovel, an iron-shod gaff, and a long stick for a "twister." Under his arm was the cage.

Little wilderness wizards that they were, the two puppies froze at sight and smell of man. Against the tinted paunrat, the red puppy was invisible, even at a few paces, so well did his coloring match the marsh thickets and muskeg foliage; but the little black fellow was an anomaly, a slip-up of nature, and with no conceivable color scheme would his glossy coat blend. The roving eyes of the Cree would spot him at the faintest move he made; but in spite of their fear, which urged them to streak for the den before it was too late, the two puppies froze in their tracks. Not even when the gray mouse quirked out of its hole and jumped over the black puppy's fore legs did he move a fraction of a wink.

In short order Carron had dug in to the barrel-like nest, and was eagerly using his twister. Out came a yapping red puppy, its fur caught in the split end of the stick. The breed rasped out an ugly word, knocked the little fellow's head against a rock, and tossed its quivering body out on the fresh dirt.

Out came another and another, to suffer the fate of the first. The mother fox put up a stiff fight in the hole, but the twister wrapped its prong in her long fur, and she was dragged out. Carron wasted a cartridge from his belt gun when he saw that whatever black blood was in the litter had come from the male fox. Her carcass was tossed aside.

He probed for the other puppies. One by one they were pulled out, examined hastily, knocked on the head, and cast in the dirt, till all the six who had followed their mother into the den were slain.

When he made sure that the nest was cleaned out, and that the hole led no farther, the breed straightened up. His face, with its straggly beard and its undertone of coppery bronze, was lurid with anger.

"*Sapristi chien!*" he growled. "*Que donc?* Be sure I saw de black puppy hairs. I could not mistake. *Que diable?* Where eez heem?"

Across his mind flitted the Cree legend, but he dismissed it with a snarl of disappointed rage. He looked around in the willow and aspen thickets, as if knowing that the black cub hovered close by; but the two puppies, lying nose to ground, did not even bat their twinkling eyes.

The breed made a great to-do at leaving the den, and hid in a clump of firs, a hundred yards away, where he could watch the bank; but all unknowingly the wily cubs were directly in his wind. They did not move until, at sundown, Carron, with a string of objurgations, left his hiding and strode homeward, baffled and enraged, but knowing that a fortune had somehow slipped through his fingers.

II

The black puppy, after his color had brought ruin and death for this first time, mourned very briefly over his wantonly slain kith. He and his red playmate were too busy getting food and eluding their many enemies.

Though scarcely three months old, they had already learned some lessons of the game of life. They knew how to watch till the king eider left its nest, and then to run and scoop up its big white egg. They learned where to bite a wild fowl so that it would not flop and make a noise. They learned that grubs were good to eat, and that a diet of mice was not.

Both of them, but especially the black puppy, whose color constantly was betraying him, learned to keep an eye upward for the eagle and black gyrfalcon by day, and for the gray muskeg owl by night. They knew how to elude the barren ground wolf by a water trail, or by slipping into a hoary marmot den.

After getting thrashed and soused in the water till he was more dead than alive, the black puppy learned to leave the nest of the trumpeter swan severely alone; but of all the lessons that the teeming marshland brought home to them in three months, the fear of man had been implanted most indelibly.

Carron went in to Fort Churchill with his fur, but instead of staying for a drinking orgy, as he usually did, he hurried back to his shack of split logs. He spent the long summer days of almost continual sun in an effort to locate the young fox. He knew it was not his eyes, but luck, which had deceived him when he dug out the den. So sure of this was he that he hunted the river valley indefatigably for more than two months before getting a glimpse of the black cub.

Even then it was by sheer luck that he located the young fox and cornered it. The pair of cubs, who always hunted, played, and slept together, had waded and swum across a strip of bottom land to a rocky island where the small river emptied into the Tha-anni. On the island the rookeries of golden-winged plover, Eskimo curlew, and blue-winged teal made fat hunting; and the rocks, with whistling pig holes under them, offered scores of safe coverts.

The pair remained on the island, and were caught there when a week of heavy rain storms, with sleety northwesters, flooded the river.

The Cree landed on the island one day, and saw tracks of half-grown foxes. Watching from a far bank of the Tha-anni, he spotted the black cub that evening. He saw it rolling about on the sand with its red playmate.

His eyes boggled. Already he was drowning himself in " permit " at a free-trader station down the bay coast.

"*Sapristi chien!*" he exulted. " Now you go eento ze cage! An' ze ozzer fox, I shoot heem for that I watch two mont's for nutting!"

That night Carron lit a big fire and camped on the island at the point where it approached the other bank most closely. He knew the nature of the barren ground fox well enough to be sure that the cubs would not try to swim more than a dozen strokes.

The next morning he set about his scheme ruthlessly. The unhatched eggs from the island rookeries were thrown into the water. The young birds were killed and tossed so far out that the current could not whirl them back to the sand. The older birds were shot or frightened away. There were no rabbits or mice to be found on the island.

After he was certain that he had made a clean sweep of everything that would afford food, the Cree strung out his baited traps, confident that hunger would drive the black fox into them before the river went down to normal.

For three nights the puppies did not stir out of their rock covert. The leaping fire was too close. In the daytime they heard the heavy-footed man searching among the bowlders for fresh signs.

On the fourth night hunger drove them out. They came directly to one of the baited sets—a plucked willow grouse dangling from a bent alder.

When the Cree reckoned that they were but half-grown foxes with half-grown instincts of wariness, he had reckoned wrong. They had had their schooling early. They licked their chops hungrily, but kept at a safe distance from the trap—and from all the others that night.

The next morning Carron saw their fresh tracks and knew that they had outguessed him. He burned his traps in a fire of evergreen boughs, and reset them. That night one was sprung, and the hairs left in it were black.

With all his cunning the breed made double sets—water sets baited with fish, and jumping sets where the foxes leaped from one bank to another.

It was in one of these last that the red playmate was taken. The black puppy leaped across a ditch, smelled the warning scent before he lit, and with a flip of his brush swerved in mid air to escape the danger; but the red puppy caught the scent too late. The cruel jaws of a trap closed over his leg, and he crouched for a moment in terror.

The black fox nosed his playmate; ran off a little way and waited for him; ran back and nosed him again, while the little red fellow lunged against the chain and bit the steel jaws of the trap.

His shrill yapping brought the Cree running. Panic-stricken, the black fox circled to the sand beach. Impelled by fear of the man, of the island, and of the strange thing which held his brother, he overcame his hereditary fear of water and swam silently toward the other bank. There he waited until morning, lonely for the playmate who did not come.

III

Early in September the water fowl began rising over the muskeg in long V's and disappearing south. When the first snow northeaster came, in the middle of October, only ptarmigan, mice, and snow rabbits were left. November and December were months of whirling winds and blinding snowstorms that leveled the billowy muskeg and climbed over the tops of the dwarf banksias.

By midwinter the black fox was fully grown, but still smaller than his red playmate would have been. His range was along the river, from the portage trail at height of land down to its confluence with the Tha-anni.

In drogues of wind-gnarled spruces he lay in wait beside padded runs of the big snow rabbits. In thickets of larch the ptarmigan roosted low to escape the soft-winged owls. If he missed his spring, the black fox followed his ptarmigan through the cold moonlight to the snowdrift into which it inevitably plunged when disturbed at night.

In fissures of the high rock cliff that skirted the valley were scampering mice and toothsome lemmings; and along this rock cliff were the fox beds of Émile Carron, who never for a day had given up the quest of the black beauty, or relinquished his hot desire to take him alive, and thereby double his price. Often, when the dainty tracks of the fox swerved wide past a trap which had been setting for weeks, until no scent or signs lingered, the Cree thought of the legend he had heard in Athabasca forest lodges.

It was shortly after midwinter that two other hunters appeared in the river valley, searching for new fur paths. They came separately, one near the portage, the other down beside the Tha-anni. After the manner of Tinnehs, they made skin lodges, but often, when afternoon dark caught them, they slept in the spruce drogues, blanketed beside a handful of fire and braving the fierce lash and paralyzing cold of a January blizzard.

Very careful they were to set no traps within a pipe walk of the Cree who had been there before them. That was all the wilderness law demanded. The open spaces belonged to the Manitou. No one had a right to call an unoccupied territory his own, save for a pipe walk on either side of his fur path.

But Carron saw red at the possibility of the black fox—his fox—being taken by another. Time after time that winter he had followed its track in the snow. He knew that it often ranged over the ground where the Tinnehs had tailed their traps.

They were wizards with traps, those Tinnehs. The Cree was mortally certain that once they suspected a black fox was in the valley, it would be theirs. They had no evil luck dogging them from breaking a law. Luck had played against him twice. He was baffled, morose.

Late one afternoon, just before a storm, Émile Carron crept out of a spruce drogue in the lower valley and approached the cliff. Below him the tops of the tallest spruces came but halfway up the face of the rock. It was a sheer drop of two hundred and fifty feet.

Across a narrow chasm in the cliff, to save a steep climb or a long detour, the Tinneh had flung a thong ladder. With the dull side of his skinning knife the Cree sawed patiently at the leading thongs till they hung by only a frayed remnant. The damage looked like the work of a rubbing rock.

Later, when the blizzard stopped, he went back. Something of superstitious fear in his make-up kept him from going close to the death trap and from looking over the cliff. There was no need. The ladder was broken, and one end whipped free against the rock.

An ugly grin of satisfaction lit up Carron's face. He turned down the valley to the lodge of his victim, and took away the furs that the Tinney had caught.

In the upper end of the valley he had to lie in waiting several days before he could plan a certain death for the other Tinneh. Again, just before an obliterating blizzard, he set his man trap. In the path where the Tinneh walked across a swift channel in the river, he cut out a good-sized block of ice. Over the opening he laid just enough dead larch sprouts to support the covering of snow.

After he had taken the second Tinneh's furs from his lodge, Carron could give every moment to the trail of the black fox. He hunted him with rifle on moonlit nights. He set snares for him. Once, during a week of still weather, he tracked him with the dogged persistence of a carcajou, night and day, without sleeping. Long since he had given up hope of ever catching the black in traps of steel.

Before the first chinook blew from the south, Carron discovered that the fox had mated. He knew this from seeing a pair of tracks always running side by side. It fanned his hopes. The black might not be caught by himself, but the red female would be easy. Then, with her as a lure—

He caught her in a lemming cave. Outside, the snow was padded down where the dog fox had faithfully stayed till the break of day and the coming of the man. Two traps held her so that she could not struggle. She was unhurt, and already big with an unborn litter.

With a rope of small braided wire the Cree tied her inside the cave. At the mouth he set a dozen traps, carelessly leaving many signs. Then, four steps away, he made the real set with all the cunning of a dozen years on the fur path—just one set. He knew better than to make another.

The next morning Émile Carron gloated over the rare prize for which he had worked a year and murdered two men. He laughed hoarsely at the frantic struggles of the black fox, and at memory of his superstitious fears of the Cree legend.

He went into the cave and raised his belt gun to shoot the female, but a thought stayed him. Her litter would half be patches, with perhaps a single black puppy. The cage was big enough for two. *Zar!* For why not take both animals down with him to Churchill?

IV

The ice went out that night. In another day the river was clear, though still high and turbulent. At any other time Carron would have waited until it was safe; but with the foxes caged he was in furious haste to get to Churchill.

Those wild things died easily in confinement. Indeed, he could see the woeful difference that a single day of imprisonment had made in them. They were used to open spaces. A cage, or even the run of a fox farm, was insufferable. Once he got them to Churchill, let them die—and let the buyer lose!

He set out one afternoon in his canoe, with the wicker cage by his feet, where he could guard against gnawing. By dark he had dropped fifteen miles down the river, and could hear the last falls above its confluence with the Tha-anni.

He paddled on swiftly, when he should have stopped. He was anxious to get past the portage that night.

It was barely light enough for him to see the steep clay bank where he always landed. He was in the clutch of white water before his terrible mistake broke upon him—before he saw that the ice had torn and ripped away the narrow portage path against the clay bank. There was no landing against the sheer face. His canoe spun in a swirl and shot down the chute. Above the lip of the falls it smashed upon a rock and upset.

Émile Carron was no swimmer.

The cage lashings broke when it hit the jumble of bowlders below the falls. One whole side was smashed in, but the pliant heather willows saved the foxes from being dashed to death.

Imprisoned under the churning water, the black fox fought madly and blindly. With a last convulsive tear he ripped out the broken side of the wicker cage. Gasping, he struggled to the surface. His red mate followed.

The water below the jumble of granite bowlders was quiet. With a dozen weak strokes they swam ashore into a thicket of water willows.

WHEN PSYCHE SMILES

Whoe'er has been where Psyche dwells
  Will not dwell more with men,
Whoe'er has wandered through her dells
  Will wander there again.
A glimpse is caught among the trees
  Of roguish eyes aglow,
And Pan is piping melodies
  Where silent waters flow.

Whoe'er has seen the nymphs at play
  Will toil no more for gold;
Whoe'er has danced with them in May
  Will nevermore grow old.
The world will seem a paltry thing,
  And only love worth while,
And always, when there comes the spring,
  He'll dream of Psyche's smile!

William Wallace Whitelock

Poison Ivy

A STORY OF THE GOOD AND EVIL IN THE LIFE OF A SMALL AMERICAN TOWN

By Louis Lacy Stevenson

Author of "Big Game," etc.

THE scene of the story is the small Ohio town of Unionville, and its characters are typical members of such a community—Judge Browne, the leading citizen of the place; Mr. Burns, president of the Union National Bank; Charlie Mechant and Tom Spiers, tellers at the bank; Gabriel White, the town marshal; and Will Wilson, who runs a gambling house which Mayor Valley protects for political reasons. Another is a stranger who drifts into town, and who is nicknamed the Snake Feeder, because his tall, thin frame suggests one of the winged insects more generally known as dragon flies or darning needles. Chancing to meet Judge Browne, the Snake Feeder makes mysterious threats against the magistrate, which seem to terrify him; but nothing further develops, the stranger staying on quietly at the St. George Hotel, apparently with nothing to do except to drink more whisky than is good for him.

Another newcomer in Unionville is a rough fellow known as the Red Man, who takes up his quarters in an abandoned shack in the shabby district down by the river.

The story is told by a high school boy, who shares many adventures with his two friends, Dewey and Squank. Just now he is the victim of a tragedy—he has been dismissed by his sweetheart, pretty Mamie Merrill.

IX

THE fall came, school opened, and I got my long trousers. I was a freshman in the high school, and therefore grown up; but there was a blight on my life that no attainment could erase.

I tried and tried to see Mamie Merrill. Night after night I walked by her house, my hands and face scrubbed, my shoes shined, my hair combed. When my new suit was delivered, the first time I had it on, I strolled up and down in front of her house.

On my third trip I glimpsed her on the front porch, and hurried forward eagerly; but as soon as she saw me she went inside and closed the door. It was all over. Never again would I see those pure agate glints dance in her eyes; and it was my fault!

I made up my mind to discuss the situation with the Snake Feeder, but the Snake Feeder had gone back to the South Side. I saw him in front of the Good Luck several times, and tried to attract his attention, but apparently he did not see me. It was a battle I had to fight alone.

I did not dare let Dewey and Squank know about it. They were good friends, but they would not have understood.

Furthermore, Dewey was acting peculiarly. He didn't go around with Squank and me as much as he did before we were in high school. He dressed better, and was cleaner, and his shoes were always blackened. He even got himself a purple shirt and a red tie. Several times, when Squank and I went walking in the evening, he refused to go, though in the past he had always wanted to tramp around the town. It was very strange. He wasn't interested in girls—or, at least, he said he wasn't.

Now and then we encountered the Red Man, who had failed to keep his word about shaking the dust of the town from his feet. He worked occasionally in White's sawmill, but spent most of his time loafing on the South Side. When he wasn't standing in front of some saloon, the woman generally followed him, walking a few steps behind like a broken-spirited dog, her head down, and that everlasting sunbonnet concealing her face.

The calico dress she wore when she came to Unionville became more and more faded,

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but she never changed it. Still, it was always neat and clean, and there was something about her that made us think she did not belong in the company of the Red Man. That may have been imagination, however.

One day we heard her say something to her man, and we were struck by the quality of her voice and enunciation. Her tones were full and deep, with a peculiar resonance, and her grammar—we knew much about grammar then — was as perfect as that of Professor North, our English teacher. She didn't use the slipshod construction common in Unionville, and she didn't omit the final letter of words ending in " g."

Though she reminded us of a dog following her master, the Red Man did not like dogs. Whenever a stray cur came within range, he booted it out into the street, and he laughed if the animal limped away yelping. The woman cringed.

" I wish Gabriel White would see him do that!" said Squank indignantly, as the Red Man kicked a poor little pup, evidently lost, that had come to him fawning. " Gabriel would pull the fellow for cruelty to animals!"

" I'll bet he beats his woman," I added.

" She acts like it," affirmed Squank.

The woman, who did not hear our conversation, picked up the little dog and petted it, and it licked her hand.

" Put that cur down!" snapped the Red Man.

She stood as if she would defy him, but he took a step toward her, and she obeyed.

The judge, court having adjourned for the noon recess, came along at that moment. The Red Man shifted his position so that he blocked the corner, and, refusing to give ground, forced the judge to walk around him. The judge looked surprised, for he was accustomed to being granted a clear path, but he did not say anything.

The Red Man grinned. The red rims around his eyes were more prominent than usual.

The detour made the judge pass very close to the woman. To give him room, she drew herself against the wall of Winters's store and turned her face away. Despite her effort, however, the judge was forced to brush against her. As he did so, she flinched. He hesitated slightly, possibly meaning to apologize, but kept on walking without saying anything, though he turned his head to look back several times on his way up the street. She did not look at him, but the judge did meet the scarlet-rimmed eyes of the Red Man.

The Red Man laughed a creaking, rasping laugh like the closing of a rusty gate. With a quick movement he seized the arm of the woman and jerked her toward him violently.

" Trying to make a catch, eh? The most prominent and respected man in Unionville, too! Made him turn around and look at you, didn't you? I've a great mind to mash in your face!"

" Jim," she replied in that full-throated voice, in which there wasn't a tremor, " I didn't do anything except give him room to pass. You know that!"

I felt Squank move. I put my hand on his arm. Squank could fight, but, as the Red Man had dropped his fist, it would be no use causing trouble right on the square.

" But he did a lot of looking," continued the Red Man. " I'll let it go this time. Gimme a dollar!"

She took a worn purse from her pocket. He opened it, removed a bill, which he placed in his shirt front, and handed the purse back.

" Get on to your tubs!" he snarled. " I've got a little celebrating to do, and I don't want to be bothered with you."

The Red Man hurried to the South Side, followed by the silent woman. She had to pass the South Side to go to the ramshackle house down by the river.

After I had eaten, I went through the alley, intending to whistle to Squank. About a half a block down I saw a couple. It was Dewey and Mamie Merrill. They were walking closely together, though the sidewalk was wide, and he was carrying her books!

I didn't go to school. Careless of what might happen, I walked boldly around the square. The Red Man came out of the Owl Saloon and went up Will Wilson's stairway. The Snake Feeder was nowhere in sight.

Disconsolate, the world crashing about my ears, I wandered to the river, and sat on the bank. Thinking dark thoughts, I watched the leaves and chips float by. The river was low, and ugly mud flats showed. The water was slimy and oily.

I couldn't endure inaction, so I walked along the bank for some distance. Then I sat down again and considered the situation, endeavoring to organize my chaotic thoughts.

I made up my mind to go away and leave Unionville forever. There was no future in that town. I would go to Detroit and find a job. Treachery was bad enough, but double treachery was unforgivable. Perhaps, in new surroundings, the wound that had been inflicted in my heart would heal. Still, I doubted it.

The sound of a pump startled me. In my state of mind I hadn't realized that I was so close to the Red Man's house. His woman was filling the wash tubs.

I don't know how long I sat there, but the sun's rays were slanting when I got up. Coming down the path, I almost ran into Martha Green, the judge's housekeeper.

" I'se sick," she was explaining to the Red Man's woman; " an' Mrs. Petralis's hiahed girl tole me you done washin'."

" I do," replied the other woman, standing in the doorway.

" You do dis basket fo' me, honey, an' Ah'll gib you a dollah. De misery in mah back is powahful bad, but I'se awful particulah. Dese heah clo'es belongs to de jedge. They has to be did jest so."

" To whom do they belong?"

" To de jedge—Jedge Browne. Ain't you heard ob him? Ev'ybody knows him. He's de biggest man in Unionville—de biggest man in de whole worl', Ah guess!"

The Red Man's woman clutched the doorpost.

" I'm sorry, but I am unable to wash those clothes for you," she said slowly. " I'm ill myself."

Then she closed the door. Grumbling and complaining, Martha picked up her basket.

" An' Ah come all de way down heah," she muttered indignantly. " Po' white trash, an' uppity!"

Still dazed and confused, I went home. An invitation to the opening dance of the Fleur de Lis Club was lying at my plate. To receive such an invitation was an honor, and a short time before I had been worrying for fear I might not be included in the list. I had never been invited to a club dance before, but now I was in high school, and was qualified.

Mamie Merrill was the girl I had planned to take, and that afternoon I had caught her with Dewey. My appetite suddenly deserted me.

" Guess that boy must be in love," said father. " He isn't eating a thing."

Mother gave him one of her looks, and he didn't pursue the subject further. I was mighty grateful to her.

Right after supper I took my books and went to my room. I tried hard, but I couldn't study. All I could think about was Mamie Merrill.

Suddenly my mood changed. If she wanted Dewey, she could have him. At the end of the term I would leave Unionville, go out into the world, and become famous. I would study law, as the Snake Feeder had advised, and possibly some day I would be a judge. Wouldn't it be grand if Dewey should come up before me?

Again my feeling changed. Her hair was so soft and brown! There was such a sweetness about her! Her eyes were pure and clean. Perhaps she had met Dewey accidentally. Perhaps she felt more kindly toward me. Tossing my books away, and stuffing the invitation in my pocket, I grabbed my cap and almost ran to her house.

She wasn't on the porch, but I didn't walk past. Instead, I went to the front door and rang the bell.

Luck was with me, for Mamie answered it; but she didn't smile when she saw me. Her attitude was one of frozen politeness.

" Well?" she asked coldly.

" Mamie—" I began.

" Miss Merrill!"

" Miss Merrill, then. May I have the pleasure of your company at the Fleur de Lis dance?"

" I have another invitation."

" Dewey?" I gasped.

" Such a question is impertinent."

Crushed utterly, I left the porch. I don't know yet how I got down the three steps leading to the walk, but I found myself in the street, traveling rapidly down town. The end had come, indeed!

Nelly Miller stopped me as I walked by her gate, unseeing, uncaring, overloaded with misery.

" Come in for a moment, if you have time," she said in a distraught manner. " I want to ask you something."

I had time—nothing but time, so I went through the gate and sat down on the porch with her. She had been crying, for her eyes were red and there were tears in her voice. After we sat down, she remained silent until I began to fidget.

" You mustn't tell anybody that I have talked to you about this," she began, twisting her fingers. " Oh, it is too terrible!"

She sobbed. I was helpless. I didn't know what to do. They were the kind of sobs that hurt.

After she had wiped her eyes until her handkerchief was a little wet ball, she controlled herself, and started again.

" Have you heard anything about Charlie Mechant and me?"

I had not. I had been too busy with my own affairs.

" No," I responded truthfully.

Still she didn't seem to be relieved.

" It is so horrible, I thought I would kill myself!" she burst out again. " It's all over town. Mrs. Jimminson told Mrs. Petralis, and Mrs. Petralis told my mother. Charlie said something—"

She stopped again, sobbing once more, but she didn't need to continue. A great light revealed things to me. That poker game on the river bank—Charlie Mechant's plea for ten dollars—the leering remark of Will Wilson. Doc Jimminson was there, and heard all that was said. He had told his wife, the greatest gossip in Unionville.

Hot indignation burned me. Young as I was, I understood what gossip meant in that town. Once besmirched, there was no hope.

I could have killed Charlie Mechant, Will Wilson, and Doc Jimminson. I liked Nelly Miller. She was a good girl, even if she couldn't decide on one beau. She was a lot older than I, but, if it hadn't been for Mamie Merrill, I might have been jealous of Charlie. Then there was Tom Spiers, and I liked Tom Spiers.

" You don't believe it, do you?" she asked suddenly.

" Nelly, it's a dirty lie," I replied with conviction. " I know—"

I stopped, the thought of Will Wilson and his gun in my mind.

" What do you know?" she persisted.

" I can't tell you, Nelly."

She caught my hand.

" Please do, please do, please do!" she pleaded, her voice nervous. " You don't know what a thing like this means to a girl in Unionville!"

" I can't tell you, but maybe I can help you."

She squeezed my fingers until they hurt.

" If you do, I'll be your friend for life! I'm desperate. I have never been gossiped about before, and I have looked down on girls who were talked about. I can't, now!" She dropped my hand and placed her fingers over her face. " And what will Tom Spiers think?" she groaned.

" Tom Spiers won't believe it."

I felt justified in saying that, because I knew Tom. He would not convict a girl without proof, and in Nelly's case it would have to be absolute proof.

My assertion seemed to comfort Nelly as she sat there silent, a tear gleaming in each eye. She was so pitiful that my heart went out to her.

" I'm a friend of yours," I whispered.

" I know you are," she replied. " I know something about your troubles, too. If I can help you with Mamie Merrill, I'll do it gladly."

It was my turn to be grateful; but then there was that refusal of my invitation. I was sunk there, and I told Nelly so.

" Would you like to take me?" she asked gently. " I wouldn't go with Charlie Mechant, because of this talk; and it wouldn't be fair to go with Tom, though he hasn't asked me yet, and probably won't, now."

" He will ask you; but I would be glad to go with you. You are awfully pretty."

She smiled a wan little smile.

" I guess we understand one another," she replied.

My mind was somewhat easier, but I didn't feel like going home to study, so when I left Nelly I walked around the square. There was a great commotion on the South Side.

The Red Man had little Jake Holton down, and was kneeling on him and beating Jake's face with his big fists, though several men were trying to pull him off. Snarling and growling, the Red Man continued to punch away, though some one shouted a warning, until Gabriel White caught him by the nape of his neck and jerked him back. The Red Man uttered a sound like the bark of a dog, and tried to free himself; but when he saw in whose clutch he was, he subsided.

" Don't club me, officer, and I'll go with you!" he whined.

Gabriel White removed his nippers from his belt, and, fastening the wrist of the Red Man, led him to the calaboose, the Red Man swaying and using his feet clumsily. Before placing him in one of the little box-like cells, the marshal searched the prisoner and removed a big bundle of bills from his pocket.

" Pinched on my lucky day!" hiccuped the Red Man. " I ran four bits up as high as the courthouse steeple in a stud game, and then I get put into a crate!"

With that, he lay down on the grated iron bed and started to snore, the odor of whisky chokingly heavy.

"A bad citizen!" remarked Gabriel White, as I walked out with him, and I agreed.

After I got home, I lay awake a long time trying to think up a way to keep my word with Nelly Miller. After going over every possible plan, and a lot that weren't possible, though I wished they were, I reached just one conclusion.

I would have to make Charlie Mechant awful mad, and, in addition, I might get myself killed. Still, I had given my word, and I couldn't break it. The way things were, it wouldn't make much difference to me if I was shot, if I could save her reputation. The world hadn't been kind to me, but I wouldn't let that stand in the way of a good deed.

As soon as the Union National opened the next morning, I was there. Charlie Mechant didn't seem glad to see me. His face was drawn and his eyes were dull. It was evident that he had been out late the night before—probably playing cards up in Will Wilson's.

"What do you want?" he demanded, when I stopped at his window, instead of going on to Tom's.

"I'm going to tell the judge about that poker game up the river that night," I said.

Charlie clutched the ledge on which the piles of bills and rows of silver were lying.

"You are?" he asked, his jaw sagging.

"I am, unless—"

He recovered before I could finish.

"Blackmail, eh? I didn't think it of you; but you've come to the wrong place, young man. Do you remember what Will Wilson told you? You know his record. Get to hell out of here, before I throw you out! I'm not as easy as you thought."

His words made me see red, but I controlled myself.

"I am going to the judge unless—"

He interrupted again.

"Unless I pay you not to," he sneered.

"Unless you make Will Wilson take back what he said about Nelly Miller when you begged him for ten dollars," I continued, disregarding the insult in his words and in his tone.

"What difference does that make to you?"

Suddenly I felt myself a man—a knight defending the honor of a lady.

"For one thing, I'm going to take her to the Fleur de Lis dance."

Charlie looked incredulous.

"That's news!"

"It may be; but unless you promise to make Will Wilson retract his dirty lie, I'm going straight to the judge. He's just going to his office now."

Charlie followed the direction of my eyes. The judge, with Gabriel White at his side, was entering the courthouse. He looked solid and dignified, a very monument of righteousness.

"I promise," exclaimed Charlie suddenly, all his contumacy and defiance gone.

Satisfied, I went outside. I had kept my word to Nelly Miller. She would be spared further pain, at least.

It being Saturday, I was free, and I strolled over to the courthouse. Law was going to be my profession, and it was my duty to gather all the information possible about courts and their procedure. I could learn much from the judge. Besides, the Red Man would be arraigned.

Two or three bedraggled and spiritless prisoners were brought in, pleaded guilty, and were sentenced. Then the judge called the name of "James Wright," and Gabriel White brought out the Red Man.

"As Jake Holton, the man he beat up, won't testify, the charge is only drunk and disorderly," said the marshal, handing the warrant to the judge.

"Stand up," said the court. "How do you plead—guilty or not guilty?"

Evidently the Red Man's liquor had not worn off, for he swayed a trifle when he obeyed the order. He looked at the judge arrogantly and defiantly. I thought he would be withered by a blast from the bench, for prisoners who faced that stern, upright, and implacable magistrate usually cringed or showed signs of contrition; but for some reason the judge merely repeated the question.

"I guess I might as well plead guilty," replied the Red Man.

"Ten dollars fine and five dollars costs!" snapped the judge.

The Red Man peeled off three five-dollar bills from a large roll, slapped the money down with a resounding thump of his big red paw, and placed his hat on his head.

"Take off your hat!" ordered Gabriel White. "Court's in session!"

"Aw, you go to hell!" snarled the Red Man.

The officer promptly knocked the hat from the Red Man's head and stood glaring at him.

"Get out of here before I fine you for contempt!" thundered the judge.

The Red Man evidently read the storm signal.

"Good morning," he said, and passed out, leaving Gabriel visibly disappointed.

Straight through the south door of the courthouse—the one leading to the Good Luck—the Red Man went, a poisonous look on his countenance. The Snake Feeder stood in the doorway.

"Make room for a man!" ordered the Red Man.

"Where is the man?" asked the Snake Feeder, looking Wright squarely in the eye.

"I'll show you!" shouted the Red Man, lunging.

The Snake Feeder shifted his position so quickly that a blow that would have crushed his face whistled by harmlessly. Stepping lightly out of the way of his assailant, who charged again like a maddened bull, the Snake Feeder, with a dexterous motion, drew something from his coat pocket. It was a dagger with a handle of a curious pattern and a long, thin blade that glittered in the morning sun.

"I don't want to dirty my knife with your blood," said the Snake Feeder, without any emotion in his voice; "but if I understand the law of self-defense, and I believe I do, if you make another move, your life belongs to me, for you attacked me first!"

The Red Man lost some of his color, and, turning, went into the Good Luck. The Snake Feeder replaced the blade in a sheath under his left arm.

All the excitement being over, I went to the library and asked for a book on common law. I studied this until supper time, and was greatly interested. I had hardly finished my meal when Tom Spiers came to the door.

"I want to see you alone," he said.

I went out with him.

"Could you get a girl for the Fleur de Lis dance?" he asked, a smile on his face.

"I have a date with Nelly Miller."

"I know that. I mean could you get another girl, if Nelly would consent to release you?"

"I want to take her."

"Isn't there some one else you'd rather take—Mamie Merrill, for instance?"

I thought he was teasing me, and I was terribly hurt. His question was like old iodine on a raw cut, and not a bit like Tom Spiers. I turned to go away, but he detained me.

"Don't get huffy! I'm your friend," he advised. "I'm in earnest."

"Mamie said she had another invitation."

"Might be a mistake about that. Look here, old man, let's come to the point. Nelly said she'd go to that dance with me, if you'd consent. Said she'd like to go with you, and all of that—she thinks a lot of you—but she thought perhaps you'd prefer to go with Mamie."

"Nelly said she couldn't go with you because of all—"

"That talk is all ended."

"Then Charlie went to Will Wilson?"

"What the dickens have Charlie or Wilson got to do with this? Mrs. Jimminson is going around telling everybody that she was mistaken, that there isn't a word of truth in what she said. She merely misunderstood something her husband told her. I had a little talk with the doctor."

I could have bitten my tongue out for mentioning Charlie Mechant or Will Wilson. Tom, evidently in a hurry to get my answer, didn't say any more about either, however.

"Well, how about it, old man?" he asked. "Nelly saw Mamie, and—"

"It's all right with me!" I shouted, running toward Mamie's house.

She was on the porch, and didn't go inside when I came through the gate. Very humbly I asked her to forgive me, and she did so. I didn't ask her what Nelly Miller had told her. That didn't matter. Nelly Miller was a real friend!

"I guess you've been punished enough," Mamie said; "but you must promise never to do anything like that again."

"I promise," I returned solemnly. "I will never do it again unless—"

"Unless what?" she asked, trying to take her hand from mine.

Was I never to be allowed to complete a sentence containing the word "unless"? I tried again, and this time I got through all right.

"I will never do it again unless you tell me I may," I said, all in one breath.

"That's different!" she replied, and the pure agate glints danced in her eyes as she squeezed my fingers.

She told me about Dewey having come to see her several evenings, and how he was always trying to walk to school with her and carry her books. Dewey was a nice young man, she said; but when he asked her to go to the Fleur de Lis dance with him, she refused, because she didn't believe that would be fair.

" So you see I told you the truth when I said I had another invitation," she continued. " Of course, you never thought to ask me if I had accepted. You just ran away. Men are awfully funny sometimes!"

The way she said it didn't offend me at all.

I passed Doc Jimminson when I was about halfway home. He had a patch over one eye, and marks on his face, and he looked as if he had been in a fight.

Tom and Nelly were sitting on her porch, though it was a cool evening. I guess they didn't mind that, though. I know I didn't.

X

Now that Mamie and I were friends again, I didn't want to fight Dewey, though there didn't seem to be any way out of it. Whenever he saw me, he made mean remarks; and when I didn't leave, he would go. The triumvirate was broken up.

Not that I was afraid of him. He was twenty pounds heavier, but I believed firmly that if it was necessary, I could hold up my end. While I was not seeking a fight, under any other circumstances I would have welcomed it, to clear up the situation. There was Mamie Merrill to be considered, however.

Dewey continuing in his attitude, I talked things over with Squank. He had admitted to me, one day, that he was interested in Maude Kaufman, and I believed he would understand my feelings.

" I guess the only way the old gang can get together again is for you two to have it out," he said, after considering for some time. " Don't take anything more from him. Let him have it!"

" But, Squank," I objected, " this can't be just a common fight. I don't want anybody except Dewey to know what it's about. Mamie can't be dragged into it."

Squank thought again—longer this time.

" I've got it," he said. " Privacy guaranteed, and everything. Dewey hasn't any objections to my company, no matter how he feels toward you. I'll ask him to ramble along the river on Saturday afternoon. About two o'clock, we'll stop in that hollow west of the Red Man's house. You stroll along there casually, and we'll see what happens."

That suited me; but I had three days in which to think things over, and the more I thought the less excuse I could find for a fight. Still, I couldn't see any way to avoid it without sacrificing my standing in Squank's eyes. Consequently I started out on Saturday afternoon, though I didn't feel at all happy about the matter.

Squank and Dewey were sitting on the bank, chatting together, when I came into the hollow.

" Hello!" said Squank.

Dewey kept right on talking, as if I wasn't there.

" I hope I'm not butting in," I said, sitting down.

" You're always butting in," answered Dewey belligerently.

That fired my temper.

" You have been, but I notice you've stopped," I shot back.

Dewey was on his feet in an instant.

" So it's fight, is it?" he demanded, his face red. " Well, I'm ready!"

He jerked off his coat and flung it on the ground. I followed his example.

Without further preparation, we went to it. Dewey led with his right—always a failing of his—and I slammed him a good one on the nose. He shook his head and bored in, striking so fast that I had no chance to block, and fists seemed to be all over my body. As his reach was longer than mine, I ducked and came up from below, hitting him a solid one just above the belt.

Dewey grunted and hunched together a little, and I thought I had him. My mistake! His left came around and struck my neck with such force that I was jarred; but I tapped him on the nose again.

That seemed to drive him crazy, and he came at me so fiercely that things became somewhat hazy. He seemed to have six hands instead of only two, and fifty knuckles on each hand.

Suddenly I found myself on the dead leaves, looking at the sun. How I got there I don't know, but I must have been there for some time, for Dewey had his coat half on. One of his eyes was purple, and when he had put his coat on he touched his cheek tenderly. I didn't remember having struck him in the eye.

I was licked, and licked soundly. In fact, I couldn't get up until Squank helped me, and for five or ten minutes the world wasn't steady. Squank washed my face, and then I began to feel as if I had been punched by a pile driver. I moved my jaw, and a thrill of pain followed. I understood then why I had lain down on the leaves.

Old Dewey, after washing his face and caressing his eye, came forward grinning, with his hand outstretched. I stuck mine out and gripped it.

"We'll let bygones be bygones?" he asked.

"Sure!" I assented gladly.

"I had it coming; but I didn't horn in until I thought Mamie was through with you for—"

"Oh, that's all right now, Dewey!"

"How bad is my eye?"

"Pretty bad," said Squank.

"That was a peach of a poke, Dates! It didn't hurt as much, though, as that one in the stomach. A little more steam, and I'd have been through."

"I gave you all I had. Am I marked much?"

"A knob on the jaw is all. You'll probably find more when you undress to-night."

"I feel like it," I admitted.

"A good fight—a good fight, indeed!" said a voice, and the Snake Feeder came through the bushes. "I took the liberty of witnessing it, because my front yard was the battleground."

"Your front yard?" asked Squank.

"Not literally so. Once in a while I come down here, not always to sleep off a jag—don't misunderstand me—but when I want to hold communion with the river, and, in so doing, to separate some of the cosmos from my ego."

"And see the Red Man?" asked Dewey jocularly.

"The Red Man? You mean that fellow Wright? More apt nomenclature—Snake Feeder, Red Man! No, I can see him on the South Side whenever I feel the urge to do so—which, I confess, is but seldom. I find a certain quietude in this retreat, when it is not disturbed by gladiators. So, Mr. Purple Eye—I'll do a little naming myself—you see the error of your suggestion."

I don't know whether Dewey liked this appellation, but he did not reply.

"To revert to my original theme," continued the Snake Feeder. "I come down here whenever I am in a certain mood—a mood in which a jest plays no part. The quiet water slipping by, steadily, ceaselessly, the harmony in the delicate voice of the riffle over yonder, trees all about, and only the sounds of nature—all these give me peace when I need it most. After a while I sense the futility of certain things that have dominated my life; but probably I bore you with such observations. I enjoyed the combat. Mr. Purple Eye had the advantage of weight and ability to withstand punishment. The gentleman whom I heard addressed as 'Dates'—I must study the etymology of that name at my leisure—acquitted himself well under the circumstances. His left is not so good, however, and if he had paid more attention to blocking, instead of attempted annihilation, he might not have found himself in the recumbent position which he assumed with so much suddenness and with no little force. Having concluded my learned analysis, I will now ask, what was it all about?"

We did not answer.

"Gentlemen indeed!" said the Snake Feeder, apparently pleased. "True knight errantry! My curiosity no longer exists. I am pleased with the handshaking at the termination; but, Mr. Dewey—I think that is your real name—why did you refer to the Red Man?"

"Because he lives just east of here."

"A fact not of my knowledge. Not a desirable locality! My surveys have told me that. Dismal, green ponds—unhealthy—spring floods—filthy and uncomfortable—poison ivy. Probably not a matter of choice with him. Still, it's none of my affair. Considering him even charitably, however, the verdict must be that he's surly and disagreeable."

The Snake Feeder stopped and inspected Dewey's eye, which was almost closed.

"It won't do to wear it like that. If you'll trust me with a bit of minor surgery, I'll reduce it for you."

Dewey assented eagerly, admitting that he did not care to go home with an eye so dismally dark that it advertised in no uncertain way the fact that it had stopped a fist.

The Snake Feeder—with much difficulty, owing to the lateness of the season—found a big leech, one of the kind that we called "bloodsuckers." Next he took his dagger from its sheath, and, while we admired the curious ebony handle and the keen blade, he struck a match and held the point in the flame for a second.

"That's to make it sterile," he explained unnecessarily.

"Where did you ever get that knife?" asked Squank.

"Oh, that's a friend of long standing. I'd feel lonely without it."

Without explaining further, the Snake Feeder made a minute incision below Dewey's eye, and attached the leech. As the leech swelled, Dewey's eye went down. When the creature seemed about to burst, the Snake Feeder removed it.

"Not a perfect job, but an improvement," he declared.

"I can see better, anyway," said Dewey.

"It will be all right in a day or two. I must be on my way. Good-by!"

The Snake Feeder went up the bank and disappeared.

"Funny fellow!" said Squank. "He talks like a book. I wonder who he is?"

"The judge knows," I asserted.

"Probably Gabriel White does, too," said Squank.

"Maybe he's a detective."

This was Dewey's suggestion. It was a new line of thought; but, if he was a detective, why should he pick out the judge from all other residents of Unionville?

"I give it up," said Dewey at last. "Let's go on uptown and see if there's any excitement."

Squank and Dewey brushed off my clothes as best they could, and we started for Main Street. Dewey felt his eye gingerly now and then, and stiffness and soreness made themselves known in various upper parts of my body. When I bit hard, my jaw seemed to creak, and I thought it was broken; but Dewey, after waggling it around in various ways that gave me intense pain, said it wasn't. Squank wanted to experiment further, in order to make certain, but I wouldn't let him.

We walked about a block up the street, and then we heard the fire bell. Forgetting our injuries, as well as the dignity of our new manhood, we set out on a wild run for the engine house—quite in accordance with custom, however, for all male Unionville that could navigate did the same at every alarm. Even grandfather used to hobble along the street with his cane—that is, when his good ear was toward the engine house and he happened to hear the bell.

It was a stiff uphill pull, and the hose cart and hook and ladder were gone when we got there. We didn't need to be told the direction of the fire, however. The running, yelling crowd, in which were mingled volunteer firemen in leather helmets, was all going one way.

"It's a good one!" panted Squank, pointing at a column of smoke rising high above the old maples.

Long before we got there, we knew it was the judge's house that was burning. Putting on all the steam we had left, we burst into a final sprint and arrived just as the ladders were going up.

Smoke was pouring from the upper and lower windows, but volunteers were dashing in to save what they could. The fire had evidently started in the basement and swept up the wide central stairway to the attic of the old frame structure.

"She's gone!" said Dewey.

A tongue of flame licked the ledge of one of the attic windows. Shouts and moans came from the backyard. Martha Green was having hysterics, and half a dozen neighbors were holding her. Once she broke away and tried to dash into the blazing house.

"De jedge, de jedge! Oh, Goddlemighty mercy, de jedge!" she shrieked.

Sure enough, the judge was nowhere in sight!

Followed by a burst of flame, the volunteer salvagers tumbled out empty-handed. Then, upright, cool, walking with his accustomed dignity, unhurried, unruffled, but with his arms full of books, came the judge through the blazing lintels of the front door. Placing the books on the grass, he turned to enter again, but Gabriel White stopped him.

"Too dangerous, judge!" the marshal said quietly.

At that instant, with a great shower of sparks, a portion of the roof fell in, and the house became a furnace.

Without a trace of emotion on his face, with his white-shot mustache still militant, the judge stood there and watched the destruction of his home. In thirty minutes, at most, despite the best efforts of the firemen, the house was nothing but a blackened skeleton.

Aaron Burns, the bank president, who lived four houses down the street, invited the judge to stay with him until he could rebuild, and the judge at once accepted the invitation.

Dewey, Squank, and I took a long walk that night. It was just like old times for us three to be together, and we discussed our futures. Squank said he was going to be an architect, and admitted that he hoped to marry Maude Kaufman. Dewey said he was going West and wanted to be a mining engineer.

" What about you, Dates?" he asked.

" I'm going to Cleveland to study law," I replied.

" And marry Mamie Merrill," continued Dewey. " She's a fine girl, and you're lucky. I'm done with women. They only get a man in trouble."

He stroked his eye thoughtfully.

It was after eleven o'clock before we were tired of prowling. I left Dewey and Squank on Main Street, and walked toward the Episcopal church, that being the shortest way home. The Snake Feeder was on the church steps.

" I thought you would never come," he said nervously, his oracular manner gone. " I've been sitting here for an hour, and everybody in town has gone past and stared at me."

" What can I do for you?"

" A great deal—though it's easy enough. All I want you to do is to remember, in case there is ever a question, that this afternoon, when that fire broke out, I was down on the river bank, two miles away, with you and Dewey and Squank. Don't say anything about it unless you are asked. If you are, don't forget the time. It's important for me, and it won't hurt you any, because it is the truth."

I promised, and the Snake Feeder shook hands with me.

I noticed that he didn't go toward the South Side, but walked quickly over to Sycamore Street, which led to the St. George.

XI

On Sunday night Squank and I stood in front of the Methodist church, waiting for the service to end. By leaving the Disciples' church, a block away, during the last verse of the last hymn, we could get there in time.

A big crowd of young fellows was on the sidewalk, waiting for girls, but Dewey was absent. He didn't want every one to see his eye, he explained; and besides, he wasn't interested in girls. I guess he felt badly about Mamie Merrill. I couldn't hold that against him.

When Maude Kaufman came out, Squank walked away with her as openly and brazenly as if he were an old hand. I was proud of him, because she was his first steady girl, and I had been afraid he would flunk at the last minute. It took a lot of nerve to step out in front of a whole gang and catch hold of a girl's arm, particularly if you were not sure whether she would turn you down or not.

Mamie was almost the last one out. She always was, for she sang in the choir. At the end of the service, the choir members had to talk about the music, and had to listen to people telling the soloist how good she was, when every other member of the choir knew that she was at least half a note off key.

To my surprise, though Mamie allowed me to take her home, she wasn't what might be called cordial. In fact, she said good night at the front gate, just as if it was the first time I had ever escorted her home from church. I couldn't leave without knowing what was wrong, so I followed her in, and we sat on the porch steps.

" What's the matter, Mamie?" I asked, reaching vainly for her little hand.

" I suppose you want me to be talked about," she answered gravely.

" You know I don't! What have I done that would make you talked about? I've come home from church with you before."

" It isn't that."

" What is it, then?"

Again I sought for that small, elusive hand, and was disappointed.

" Do you think a respectable girl likes to have fellows fighting about her?"

That surely took me aback!

" How did you know about it? Who told you?"

" No one told me. I saw the marks on your face."

The bump on my jaw was fairly prominent, I knew.

" And I know with whom you fought, of course."

" How do you know that?"

" Dewey wasn't with you in front of the church to-night, and yesterday, when he was going home from the fire at the judge's house, I saw his eye. I'm not foolish." Indeed she wasn't! " I suppose you fought right on the square, too, and all my friends know about it!"

Tears were in her voice.

I told her the details of the fight—how it started, where it took place, and how Dewey and I shook hands after I was licked.

" Nobody saw it except Squank and the Snake Feeder," I concluded; " and the Snake Feeder doesn't know what it was about."

Mention of the Snake Feeder caused her to question me. She had heard him discussed at home and elsewhere—Unionville had its full share of gossips—and while in general she did not approve of him, still, as a mystery, he interested her. I told her all I knew about him, including his request of the night before.

" He's probably hiding here in Unionville," she asserted. " I can't see why the judge should be afraid of a man like him. A man in the judge's position naturally has some enemies, but a man who drinks, and hangs around the South Side, and sleeps on the river bank, shouldn't be able to frighten him."

" He was scared that day."

" But the Snake Feeder has kept away from the judge ever since. Perhaps the judge was mistaken. The Snake Feeder might look like some one he used to know. Where does he get his money to live at the St. George without working?"

" He told us that years ago—but that was in confidence. Dewey thinks he's a detective."

" A detective? What would a detective want with the judge? The judge never did anything wrong. He couldn't. Even Mr. Burns looks up to him so much that he takes him into his home when the judge's house burns down. Anyway, a detective wouldn't get drunk and sleep on the river bank. A detective wouldn't cough and faint, either."

" Maybe that's only a disguise."

With a woman's obstinacy, she persisted in her viewpoint, and ridiculed me.

" I wish you wouldn't run down the Snake Feeder, Mamie. He was a real friend to me when I was in great trouble. He made me quit worrying a little, and it's because of his advice that I'm going to study law."

" You in trouble! When?"

" When you were angry with me. It was the night when you were on the porch, and went inside when you saw me. I walked on down town and met the Snake Feeder accidentally. He bought me a soda, and talked with me, and I felt better. I told him my troubles—without mentioning your name. He was the only one I could tell. The way he talked to me made me feel so friendly toward him that I haven't got over it. I was terribly blue, and had made up my mind to leave Unionville forever."

She moved over closer toward me, and I found her hand.

" Still, he must have something on his conscience, or he wouldn't have waited for you and made you promise to remember where he was when the fire broke out."

" Just suppose you were a mystery in Unionville, and Gabriel White heard you threaten the judge. Then suppose the judge's house caught fire—wouldn't you want all the protection you could find?"

She agreed that that was reasonable, but held that it still looked suspicious.

With that we dismissed the subject. We looked at the stars, and talked about ourselves. I wanted to ask her to marry me. She was the most desirable woman in the world, and being near her fairly intoxicated me; but I thought of the long years of school ahead of me, and kept my feelings to myself.

After all, our argument over the Snake Feeder was needless. I learned that on Monday, when I read the *Daily News*. No blame could be attached to him for the fire. A statement made by the judge himself placed the responsibility on his housekeeper. Martha had been ironing in the cellar and enjoying her pipe. The doorbell rang, and she answered it. Then, forgetting her pipe, Martha had put away the ironed clothes and started the evening meal. The pipe had set fire to the ironing board, and the woodwork had caught.

The loss was trifling, the judge continued, for everything was covered by insurance. He regretted the destruction of his law library, but the books were insured to their full value. He also regretted the trouble the fire was causing his good friend Mr. Burns, who was sheltering him, and he thanked the citizens for their expressions of sympathy.

I searched for the Snake Feeder, thinking that possibly he had not seen the paper, but I failed to find him on the square. At the St. George, the clerk said he wasn't feeling well, and was in his room.

He gave me the room number and I went upstairs. I rapped, and a weak voice told me to come in.

The Snake Feeder, his face as white as lime, was lying on his bed. He was ill, but he brightened when he saw me. I told him what the paper had said.

"That helps—" he began, only to be interrupted by a cough.

The paroxysm was so violent that it rocked and shook him until I was frightened. He was reaching for something, but was too weak to pick it up. I saw that it was his handkerchief, and handed it to him. He held it over his mouth, and continued to cough. The linen crimsoned quickly.

I ran out and called Dr. Eastend. The doctor grabbed his medicine case and ran back with me.

"He'll drop off in one of those spells," he said. "You wait outside until I tell you you may come in."

In about half an hour Dr. Eastend came into the office, and said that the Snake Feeder wanted to see me.

"How is he?" I asked.

"Better, but still weak. Don't excite him."

The sick man was undressed and in bed. His slight frame didn't seem to raise the covers at all, but the coughing had stopped, and he smiled, with a bright fever glow in each cheek.

"Have these attacks once in a while," he whispered. "Going out one of these days. No matter! I'm almost ready. If I do go, there's something you can do for me."

"Anything," I replied, sadness coming over me, for I liked the Snake Feeder, and he looked like a dead man.

"I may last years and I may flicker in a flash," he continued. "That's on the knees of the gods. Also, I may go out on the end of a rope."

A ferocious expression destroyed the peace of his countenance for a moment—or it may have been a spasm of pain.

"That, too, is on the knees of the gods," he went on. "If you are near enough when I do go, open my trunk, find a package marked 'private,' and burn it. I've got my affairs in such shape that you'll have no difficulty in gaining access to my belongings. You may open it before you destroy it, if you wish. It won't matter—then."

He relaxed. I thought he had gone to sleep, and I was just about to tiptoe out.

"Unlock the middle drawer in the dresser and get me that bottle," he ordered.

I opened the drawer and took out a quart of whisky. At his request I filled a tumbler half full, and poured in water until he told me to stop. He drained the glass in a couple of gulps. The potent liquor apparently restored a little of his strength.

"How badly was the judge's house damaged?" he asked.

"Ruined."

"How did he seem to take it?"

"He didn't seem to be disturbed. He's fully insured."

"Did he save anything?"

"Only a few books."

"Any furniture or pictures?"

I shook my head.

"Has he a place to stay, or has he gone to a hotel?"

The St. George was the only first-class hotel in Unionville.

"Aaron Burns, president of the Union National—"

"I know who he is."

"He asked the judge to live with him until he could rebuild, and the judge said he would."

The Snake Feeder grunted, and then rested a few moments.

"Put my knife under my pillow, will you?" he asked.

I unsheathed the weapon and placed it where he indicated.

"Kind of you to come and see me," he said. "I won't forget it. Now I'm tired—very tired!"

He turned his face toward the wall, and I went out.

XII

WALTER SWOPE, Raymond Baxter, and Paul Duke had been arrested. They were in the calaboose in the rear of the engine house. As soon as they had been arraigned, they would be transferred to the red brick jail across the street from the Baptist church.

This was indeed a sensation for Unionville. It was a great sensation for Dewey, Squank, and me, for never before had any one we knew so well been put behind steel bars. Though Walter, Raymond, and Paul were older than we, they were in the same classes in school—or had been, until we entered the high school. This was not because they were not bright, but because they had been obliged to go to work several times, in order to continue their schooling. All three of them were working when they were arrested.

We were in the same Sunday school class at the Disciples' church, though they had not attended for some time.

Walter worked in Winters's dry goods store, Raymond in Johnson's grocery, and Paul in Berwind's hardware store. We had often stopped in to see them, and in a way we had envied them—before their arrest—because they were more or less free and independent; and now they were imprisoned!

The reason why was no secret. The *Daily News* published it in full. The three employers had missed money from their tills. After trying vainly to catch the thieves through their own efforts, they had appealed to Gabriel White. It did not take him long to solve the mystery, though he, a sworn officer of the law, admitted openly that he hated to put the boys in jail, because, although he was certain they were guilty, they really were not the greatest culprits.

Walter, Raymond, and Paul protested their innocence at first, but in the gloom of the cubby-hole prison they thought things over, sent for the marshal, and confessed. They had taken the money, and had lost it gambling at Will Wilson's. The *Daily News* published the confession.

That threw the town into an uproar. Next Sunday Dr. Boone, the Presbyterian pastor, stood in his pulpit, his gray hair tousled, his rubicund face more red than usual, and in the best sermon of his career denounced gambling, those who kept gambling places, and those who permitted such places to exist. He didn't name Will Wilson, but he drew a portrait of a noxious black spider lurking at the entrance to its web, and seeking to entice youth and innocence into its entanglements.

The preacher painted so vivid a picture that all present could see the sorrow, ruin, and devastation such places caused; and the judge, before whom the boys who had provided the subject for his text would be tried, was one of his closest auditors.

The *Daily News* had a reporter present, and published a column and a half of that sermon on the first page. It was said, on good authority, that this almost caused the paper heavy advertising losses, as merchants who were friends of Will Wilson threatened to withdraw their support if it didn't stop its "attacks."

This indicates that there was no unanimity of sentiment in Unionville. There wasn't. The town was split into two camps. Will Wilson, in the years he had kept a gambling room, had become an institution. While many were emphatic in their agreement with Dr. Boone, there were many, too, who—perhaps with recollections of campaign contributions—spoke well of Will Wilson.

He conducted a high-grade place, they maintained. He was a square gambler, he never refused to heed an appeal in the name of charity, and he always paid his debts. True, the three boys in the calaboose were under age, but they were large and husky lads, and Will Wilson had no means of knowing that they hadn't passed their twenty-first birthdays. There must have been something wrong with those boys, or they would not have gambled. That the fault was in themselves was proved by the fact that they were confessed thieves. The blame, therefore, could not justly be laid on Wilson.

Mayor Valley was among those who argued along these lines. He had been elected on the "liberal ticket," and Will Wilson had been one of his most active supporters. The mayor believed in a wide open town because it meant good business, and good business meant prosperity for everybody. Nobody would come to Unionville if it was closed tight, he often said.

Gabriel White didn't agree. It was his belief—and he told the mayor so in front of the courthouse, careless of who might be listening—that Will Wilson should be imprisoned instead of Walter, Raymond, and Paul.

"I wouldn't have arrested them, either, if Winters and Johnson and Berwind hadn't been set on it," he said. "Those boys see their mistake, and if they had a little time they'd pay back every cent they took. I've known them since they were knee high to a grasshopper, and I'd go on their bond. You can't blame their bosses too much, though. They've got to protect themselves. Fact is, the one we ought to lock up is Will Wilson. We can't do that. Even if we could, we couldn't let those boys go; but you give me the order, and I'll run Will Wilson so far out of Unionville he'll never find the way back. I'll smash up his furniture into firewood, and use his cards and chips for kindling!"

"You won't get any such order from

me, White," replied the mayor, pulling down his fancy vest over his ample stomach. The vest, worn always, somewhat as a robe of office, had a tendency to ascend and expose a stretch of shirt. "You needn't fly off the handle, either. Those damned thieves only got what's coming to them. Wilson is a friend of mine, and he stays where he is."

"What?" demanded the marshal, his sandy hair bristling, and fire in his bluish gray eyes.

"He stays. I'm responsible for the way this town is run, and I say he stays. I don't give a damn how much yapping there is about it. That lets you out. With election coming next month, instead of knocking the administration, you ought to be helping it. You're on the same ticket. It's a pretty respectable ticket, too, with Judge Browne and the others."

The mayor rubbed together his soft, pudgy hands complacently.

"By God, even with the judge on the ticket, I've a notion to resign!" shouted the marshal, his habitual calm shattered. "When a dirty, thieving skunk, the meanest kind of a thief—a thief lower than a burglar, because a burglar risks his hide in his business—can ruin the boys of Unionville, and the mayor of the town stands for him, it's time for me to quit and pull my freight! I've got a wife and two kids, and I've got to keep my reputation clean."

"Keep your shirt on, White," growled the mayor, somewhat off poise. A controversy over Gabriel White's quitting the ticket might result in upsetting the administration, because of his popularity. "Calling names doesn't get anybody anything. Be reasonable. Can't you see you're putting me in a nasty hole?"

"I had to put those three boys in the lockup. That's a worse hole than you've been put in!"

"I'm not responsible for what they did," flared the mayor, the shot evidently having hit. "Resign and be damned! Go and get a job preaching, or go to hell, for all I care! Will Wilson stays open."

The mayor's loss of temper seemed to quiet the marshal.

"I've reconsidered my resignation," he said. "I haven't changed my mind about Will Wilson. I'd like to kick him from here to Sandusky, but I'll stay on the ticket. I want a leave of absence for a week. I've got to get away for a while after the trial."

"Sure, sure, Gabe," replied the mayor quickly. "You're entitled to it, and more. Been working day and night. Take ten days, if you feel like it. Orrie Smith's a good deputy—he'll fill your place all right."

Smiling and happy, the mayor thrust out his hand, but Gabriel White apparently didn't see it. However, having carried his point, the mayor stood with beaming face and watched the marshal stride away.

As soon as Gabriel White was out of sight, Wilson sauntered across the street. Valley told him of the encounter and its termination.

"Called the old fool's bluff, eh?" Wilson asked. "They can't four-flush with you, Frank! White's just like the rest of those white-livered reformers. This town would be better off if all the goo-goos were run out. I'd like to have old Boone up in my place for about five minutes. I'd make that preacher look like a sausage! This thing about them kids will blow over in a few days. I'll keep young fellows out after this. Plenty of trade without them, and no comebacks. I won't forget what you done for me, next month. A good many ask me how to vote, and they'll vote right!"

Wilson shook hands with the mayor warmly, and together they went over to the Good Luck, picking up a crowd of adherents as they passed along the sidewalk. Wilson never drank, but he had no aversion to buying drinks for others. It was rumored that he served free liquor on Saturday nights in his gambling room, there being a negro whose only duty was to wait on those who were thirsty.

It was reported that that night the biggest poker game in the history of Unionville took place at Will Wilson's. I could credit the rumor, for I was talking to Tom Spiers in the Union National when Will Wilson made his deposit.

"I've got old Gabe White right on the hip, Mechant," he boasted, tossing through the openings several thick packages of bank notes. "He's through. Valley's pulled his fangs. He knows where I get off in Unionville—you've got some evidence right in your hands now. By the way, I'm holding a piece of paper of yours that's due just two weeks from Saturday. Don't forget the date. There won't be any extension. If you don't come through, I'll hand it to Burns—he's a friend of mine, too. It's up to you, Mechant—if you want to stay in the banking business."

"Don't ever do that, Will!" the teller begged softly, looking toward the door of the president's office, though his hands were still automatically sorting the bills into ones, fives, tens, twenties, fifties, and a few hundreds.

"You pay or I do," replied Wilson, his eyes green stone, his mouth a mere slit in his face. "It's business with me!"

There was a jingle of silver, Mechant, usually deft, having knocked over a pile of half dollars. Tom Spiers, who had been in the vault, came out, and I didn't hear Charlie's reply.

Tom felt badly over the arrest of Walter, Raymond, and Paul. While talking about them, he mentioned that they were to be arraigned that afternoon.

"Their folks can't help them, either," he continued. "I guess they'll have to go over the road and be marked for life."

I informed Dewey and Squank of the time of the arraignment, and, by agreement, we allowed school to do the best it could without us.

Shortly after we found places, the court room being well filled, Gabriel White brought in the three pale, nervous, downcast prisoners, and placed them in the pen. The judge, sitting up there on the bench, looked more severe than usual.

"Have you any counsel?" he asked the boys, after reading the warrant.

"No," answered Raymond, apparently the spokesman for the trio.

"Have you any means of employing any?"

Raymond shook his head. Every one in the court room knew that it was impossible for these boys to pay the fee of a lawyer.

A vagrant breeze caught the warrant, lifted it from the judge's desk, and caused it to flutter to the floor. Before Ellis Parker, the clerk, could get up, the judge had leaned over to retrieve it, his face disappearing behind the desk.

At that moment the Snake Feeder, who had come forward without attracting attention, reached the railing.

"Your honor," he began, and stopped.

At the sound of the Snake Feeder's voice, the judge lifted his head as if actuated by a spring. The paper dropped from his fingers. His body half raised, he sat there in a queer position, resembling a mechanical toy the spring of which has run down. Nor did he regain control of his muscles until Gabriel White reached his side.

"Proceed," he said, his mouth twitching as if he were chewing tobacco; but the judge never chewed.

"I shan't infringe on the dignity of this court," said the Snake Feeder, and the judge relaxed. "I merely wish to inquire whether, if I desire to appear here, it will be necessary for me to submit proof to you that I am a member of the bar of this State?"

"What relevancy has your standing to the case at bar?" inquired the judge, in a voice that was off key.

"The fact that I may appear as attorney of record for the respondents Swope, Baxter, and Duke. On that ground may I have your permission for a short consultation with them?"

The judge, his eyes held by those of the Snake Feeder, nodded assent.

"Recess," he announced.

Accompanied by Gabriel White, the Snake Feeder, Walter, Raymond, and Paul went out of the room. The judge did not leave the bench. He sat there idly, his fingers folding and unfolding the warrant.

A buzz went over the court room. Astonishment was on many faces. Curious eyes turned toward the door through which the Snake Feeder would enter. He was a lawyer, and so acknowledged by the judge!

The astonishment had not ended when the Snake Feeder, the prisoners, and the marshal returned.

"May it please the court," said the Snake Feeder, "I will appear for these respondents. We will waive the reading of the information and stand mute."

"What is your name?" Ellis Parker asked him.

"It can't be Snake Feeder in the record," he answered with a smile. "Enter it as Frank Morton."

As he uttered the name, my eyes happened to be on the judge, and I'm certain that he shrank back a trifle.

"Will your honor fix bail?" asked the Snake Feeder casually.

"One thousand dollars, two sureties, in each case."

"As there is little likelihood of my clients being able to furnish bonds in that amount, they request that you will set the case for as early a date as possible. We are ready to proceed at any time."

The judge consulted with Howard Hamilton, the gray-haired prosecutor.

"Monday morning, at half past nine,"

the judge announced. "Court is adjourned until that time."

Parker pounded with his gavel, and the judge disappeared in his chambers. The Snake Feeder exchanged a few words with the three boys, and the marshal took them away. Whatever it was that the Snake Feeder said, it seemed to cheer them.

The Snake Feeder would have gone on out, but Dr. Boone stopped him.

"How much property would bondsmen have to have to get those boys out?" the preacher asked, his fine old features grave.

"About six thousand dollars."

His face fell, then brightened.

"I think I can find a man who has plenty of property, and who will be willing to sign with me," he said. "Please wait here a few minutes."

The Snake Feeder assented, and Dr. Boone hurried over to the Union National. When he returned, he was in distress.

"Mr. Burns couldn't see his way to do it," he announced sorrowfully. "I'm afraid the boys will have to remain in jail over Sunday."

"What excuse did he give?" asked the Snake Feeder.

The minister appeared confused.

"Never mind!" said the lawyer. "Will Wilson is one of his biggest depositors. You're a bit unworldly, dominie!"

Squank was wild.

"I'd like to lead Burns around by the hair," he exclaimed. "I wish he was in jail, and I was the only one who could get him out!"

"Nobody but the preacher would have asked him," said Dewey. "Don't you remember that he was going to fire Tom Spiers because Tom got Ned Sawyer to appear before the grand jury and give information about Wilson? Old Burns attends church on Sundays, but the rest of the time he's a business man. Wilson's deposit is worth money to him. Stick a dollar before Burns's eyes, and he couldn't see the devil, if he was right in front of him!"

"The Snake Feeder upset your theory about his being a detective," interrupted Squank. "He's a lawyer."

"That's why he was talking to me about the law," I supplied.

"I hope he gets the boys free," said Dewey; "but I don't think he's got much of a chance. They've confessed."

"I've got a feeling that he'll accomplish something," I answered. "There's something about the Snake Feeder that gives me confidence."

The clock in the window of Fillmore's jewelry store showed twenty-five past five, and supper was promptly at half past. We steamed up the street at better than four miles an hour. I got home in time to sit down with the family, and I told them the happenings of the afternoon.

"So Aaron Burns wouldn't go on the bond with Dr. Boone?" asked grandfather, sitting up straight in his chair. "The damned old—"

"Father!" exclaimed mother.

Grandfather was a deacon in the Disciples' church, and this was the first time we had ever heard him even approach profanity of speech.

"I mean it," he continued, pounding on the table with the handle of his knife. "He's a damned old hypocrite, and nothing else. I'd like to yank his goatee! Sits in church every Sunday, listening to next to the best preaching in town, and then won't do a Christian act when he has a chance! Boy, get me my hat, and come along with me."

Grandfather's seventy years seemed to slip from him as he pushed back his plate and got up without holding his knee. The keen eyes under his bushy brows looked like pieces of steel. He didn't even take hold of my arm as we went up the hill.

At Aaron Burns's house, the banker wanted him to sit down while he called the judge, but grandfather refused.

"My business will take me only a minute," he said shortly. "Get a pen and ink, will you?"

The judge came downstairs almost immediately, and greeted grandfather in a dignified but friendly manner.

"Judge Browne, do I understand that the bail of that Swope boy and those other two is a thousand dollars each, with two sureties?"

"That is correct," answered the judge.

"If I put up those two farms of mine, will you accept one surety?"

"Certainly," said the judge quickly.

Every one knew the value of grandfather's property. His three hundred and twenty acres were the best in Goshen township. The judge filled out the papers, and grandfather signed them.

"They will be out within half an hour," said the judge; "but, Mr. Harvey, you are assuming a heavy responsibility."

"I'm thinking of principle," said grandfather, and I thought he resembled Abraham Lincoln.

"You can tell the Snake Feeder that I believe I was mistaken in regard to certain conclusions I had reached," said grandfather, on the way home.

I didn't see the Snake Feeder, however, for when I left grandfather at home, I hurried over to Mamie's. My dancing lessons were to begin. The Fleur de Lis affair was only a week away, and I didn't know a step; but as Mamie had promised to teach me, I wasn't worrying.

I didn't do very well at first. I thought more about Mamie than about where my feet were going. With my arm around her and her hand in mine, I couldn't help it.

"You're awfully clumsy!" she said, after three or four trials. "I don't believe you ever will learn. We'll have to practice every night!"

I was thankful for my stupidity. With her every night for a week! She had never before let me come to see her except on Sunday nights, and had even refused to let me carry her books home from school. The brightest minds do not get all the prizes life has to offer!

XIII

Everybody who could find space crowded into the court room long before half past nine on Monday morning, though it was generally expected that because of the boys' confession the trial would be nothing more than a formality. The main interest was in the Snake Feeder.

"I don't see what he can do for them," said Dewey.

"He might plead for mercy," Squank answered.

"A fat chance he'd have with the judge! The judge doesn't know the meaning of the word. I believe that the Snake Feeder, the way he stands with the judge, has hurt their case more than he's helped it. What do you think, Dates?"

Reluctantly I agreed. It did seem that way.

Necks were craned when the Snake Feeder entered. He was even better dressed than usual, with his clothes pressed into sharp creases and his linen immaculate. His blue eyes were bright and his expression animated. We agreed that if he hadn't been so frightfully thin, he would have been of striking appearance; but with the skin drawn tightly over his cheek bones, and his lips bloodless, he seemed like a symbol of death to me.

He didn't bring a pile of law books with him, as most attorneys seem to do. All he had was a clip of note paper, which he placed on the table beside him. Prosecutor Hamilton came in a few minutes afterward, nodded coldly at the Snake Feeder, and sat down at the opposite side of the table. He did not look at Walter, Raymond, and Paul, who, dressed in their best clothes, were sitting in a row behind their attorney.

The judge was late—a most unusual thing. It was a quarter of an hour after the time set when Ellis Parker rapped for order, and every one stood up while the judge ascended the bench.

"Your honor," said the Snake Feeder, and he seemed to stress the two words slightly, "we demand a jury trial."

Parker picked a dozen capsules from the glass bowl, opened them, and called the names of the men so chosen. Prosecutor Hamilton examined the talesmen in a perfunctory manner, and turned them over to the Snake Feeder.

"Pass the jury," said the attorney for the defense.

Then the prosecutor made a brief address, in which he outlined the case and demanded the conviction of Walter, Raymond, and Paul for grand larceny.

"We waive the opening," said the Snake Feeder.

"Isn't he going to do anything?" asked Squank uneasily.

"Wait," I advised, though I didn't know why.

On the cross-examination of Mr. Winters, the Snake Feeder asked only if, until the time of the arrest, he hadn't regarded Walter Swope as an excellent employee, honest and industrious.

"Yes," said the dry goods man.

Then Gabriel White was called to the stand. After he had testified to the evidence he had obtained, and to the arrest of Walter, he identified the money he had found in Walter's pocket. He hadn't marked it, he said, but had made a record of the serial number on each bill before placing it in the cash drawer. The numbers he read corresponded with those on the bills which were marked as an exhibit. He testified that Walter had confessed, and that he and his deputy had heard the confession, which was voluntary.

"Take the witness," said Mr. Hamilton.

This time the Snake Feeder asked three questions.

"How long have you known Walter Swope?"

"All his life."

"Did you regard him as a good boy?"

"One of the best in town."

"Do you know Will Wilson?"

"Yes."

"That's all!"

When Ben Johnson took the stand, the questions on both direct examination and cross-examination were almost exactly the same as those put to Mr. Winters. Then Gabriel White was recalled, and the Snake Feeder asked him how long he had known Raymond, and whether or not he thought he was a good boy. The marshal gave the same answers as he had for Walter. The Snake Feeder asked him again if he knew Will Wilson, and again the marshal said he did.

Mr. Berwind came next to testify against Paul, and once more it was the same thing. Gabriel White had known Paul ever since he was a baby, and thought him, too, one of the best boys in town.

"I will ask you again, do you know Will Wilson?" said the Snake Feeder.

"I object to that question as incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial," said the prosecutor. "He has answered it twice now. Of course he knows Will Wilson—everybody does. We'll concede that."

"If my brother concedes, I'm satisfied," drawled the Snake Feeder.

"The people rest," said the prosecutor.

"Walter Swope!" said the Snake Feeder.

Walter, very nervous, took the stand.

"How old are you?"

"N-nineteen," he stuttered.

"Don't be frightened. Is your father alive?"

"He died when I was five years old."

In response to questions, Walter told of the struggles of his mother to keep the family together, and how he had had to stop school several times and go to work.

"Since you attended school last, how much had you saved?" asked the Snake Feeder.

"Seventy-four dollars."

The Snake Feeder placed Walter's bank book in evidence.

"How much money, approximately, have you lost playing cards?"

The judge overruled an objection.

"About two hundred dollars."

"Where?"

Again the prosecutor objected. The judge seemed about to rule against the Snake Feeder; but the lawyer looked at him intently, and he allowed the question to stand.

"At Will Wilson's," said Walter.

"How did you happen to go there in the first place?"

"Everybody went there. I played just for fun at first—ten-cent limit; but I began to lose, and pretty soon I was playing a dollar limit. I must have been crazy, I guess. Then I—"

The Snake Feeder stopped him.

"Take the witness," he said, turning to Mr. Hamilton.

"You admit that you stole—"

"Don't answer that question," cried the Snake Feeder. "Your honor, I object!"

"Under his constitutional rights the defendant is not obliged to incriminate himself," said the judge in a husky voice.

Gabriel White handed him a glass of water, which he drank quickly, and indicated that he desired another.

"No further cross-examination," said the prosecutor.

The Snake Feeder called Raymond. He testified that he was obliged to work because his father was incapacitated by wounds received in the Civil War, the government allowing him only a small pension. He had saved sixty dollars, he said—the Snake Feeder put his bank book, too, in evidence—and had lost about two hundred and fifty dollars at Will Wilson's.

He was not cross-examined; nor was Paul Duke, who testified that he worked because there were ten children in his family, and his father received only small wages. He hadn't been able to save anything, and had lost about the same amount as Raymond.

"The defense rests," said the Snake Feeder, when Paul stepped down from the stand. "May I address the court before we proceed with arguments?"

The judge nodded his head.

"The amounts which these boys swear they lost at poker, after their savings are deducted, correspond almost exactly with those the prosecution declares were taken illegally," said the Snake Feeder. "In behalf of my clients, I herewith present to the court a cashier's check, drawn on the Union Trust Company of Cleveland, for five hundred and sixteen dollars."

He gave the check to Parker, who reached up and laid it on the judge's desk. The judge seemed to draw away from it.

"Proceed with the arguments," he said a trifle thickly, shoving the piece of blue paper toward the clerk with his gavel.

Mr. Hamilton talked only a few minutes. He declared that the State had established its case, and all that the jury could do was to return a verdict of guilty, no matter how unpleasant it might be. When he sat down, the general belief was that Walter, Raymond, and Paul were on their way to prison.

Taking a deep draft of water, the Snake Feeder walked over to the jury box. He didn't shout or orate, he didn't even gesture, but there was an impression of power about him. In simple, homely language he repeated the life stories of the defendants, but he did it in a manner that made every one who heard him visualize their homes, their struggles, and their temptations.

"And now you twelve men, most of you heads of families, are to decide whether you will send the son of a widow, the son of a man who fought for the Union, and the son who is helping to support his brothers and sisters, to the penitentiary," he continued. "Think what that means. Here are three boys who have reached an age when thoughts of further public school education would be out of the minds of most youths, yet who are ambitious and intelligent enough to be willing to work, so that they may at least go through high school. Is that not an indication of character? Remember that that fact is not denied. Remember, too, when you are in the jury room, that on the testimony of their employers, except for this one instance, they have been exemplary youths. Add to that the testimony of Gabriel White, who has known all three since babyhood.

"The money they are accused of taking has been repaid to the last dollar. You have witnessed that. Mr. Winters, Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Berwind lose nothing except the services of these three boys, if they are convicted.

"These boys have been in jail. Their names have been in your newspaper. Their terrible mistake—for such it was—is known to every one in Unionville. They have paid, and have paid heavily, for their error, and yet the State asks them to pay still more. These boys are not the real thieves. As the real thief, I submit, gentlemen of the jury, a fat, complacent, smug parasite, who has his freedom and probably even now is fleecing victims in his den on the South Side. That there may be no confusion in your minds, and that there may be no mistake, I do not hesitate to name the man I accuse, Will—"

"Object!" snapped the prosecutor. "The argument is not proper."

"It is proper," continued the Snake Feeder, and the judge did not stop him. "Will Wilson's name is in the evidence. My learned brother did not object to that, except to my repetition of the question I asked Marshal White, nor did he attempt to break down the testimony as to where the money was lost. Gentlemen of the jury, I state without fear of contradiction that the man who should rightfully be in the place of the widow's son, the veteran's son, and the laborer's son is William Wilson, the blue-jowled, black-headed bloodsucker of Unionville!"

Those in the court room stood immobile. The quiet was like the hush of early morning just before the birds awaken.

"I object!" yelled Mr. Hamilton.

"And why is Will Wilson above the law?" blazed the Snake Feeder, before the court had a chance to rule, his blue eyes flashing. "There isn't a man here that can't answer that question. It is because he is allowed to prey on his fellow human beings by certain authorities — and from this charge I except but one man, Gabriel White—who haven't the backbone—"

"I object!" screamed the prosecutor.

The Snake Feeder paused, but the judge was inarticulate.

"Gentlemen of the jury, if a cancer was eating the body of any one of you, would you not have a surgeon apply the knife? Then why don't you use the knife of good citizenship on those who flout the laws of the State—those who debauch boys, who make families suffer, who bring trouble into happy homes? You men with wives and children, can you picture anything more terrible than a desolated home?"

The Snake Feeder was interrupted by a clatter. The judge had dropped his gavel on the rostrum. Parker picked it up for him.

"It is not these three boys who are here on trial—it is Unionville itself. If these boys are guilty, so is William Wilson, as well as those authorities, sworn to uphold the law, who—"

"Not proper argument! I object!" shouted the prosecutor, beads of sweat standing on his face.

"Objection sustained," rasped the judge.

"I have concluded, anyway," said the Snake Feeder. "I am content to rest the case on the facts as brought forth."

Prosecutor Hamilton floundered considerably in his closing plea, though he endeavored to fix the minds of the jurors on the fact that the boys had actually taken the money. The charge of the judge touched only on the law, and he seemed to stress the meaning of the words "reasonable doubt." Perhaps it was my lack of legal knowledge that made it appear so.

The jury was not out more than fifteen minutes, and nobody left the court room.

"Not guilty," said the foreman, when the dozen men faced the judge.

Ellis Parker almost broke his mallet in trying to quell the demonstration that followed. Men hurried forward to shake hands with Walter, Raymond, and Paul, who stood there blinking uncomprehendingly. They had heard the door of the penitentiary close on them, only to have it opened again. Others sought the Snake Feeder, but he had left the court room.

He didn't get out of the building, however. In the corridor Will Wilson met him. The gambler's right hand was in his coat pocket, and he shoved his coat against the Snake Feeder's stomach. His eyes were shooting green sparks, and his face was contorted with fury. He had stood in the back of the court room and had heard himself excoriated.

"I'm going to kill you!" he said, venom in his voice.

"I feel your gun," replied the Snake Feeder calmly. "Why don't you pull the trigger?"

Wilson's teeth clicked together, his mouth opening and shutting. It was evident that his will was telling his finger to press a little harder, but some greater power caused it to disobey. He was helpless because of the intensity of his rage.

"No, you won't kill me here," taunted the Snake Feeder. "You're too yellow! You might, if you were in your gambling hell, or if you met me alone some dark night, but not here in the court room, where you've just been convicted as a thief. Don't let me stop you, if I'm misjudging you. I'm merely the Snake Feeder; but if you kill me, they'll take you down to Columbus, place a rope around your neck, and drop you through a little hole in the floor. Maybe you'd better shoot. It would be a good thing for Unionville!"

"You rotten, dirty, drunken bum!" chattered Wilson. "You half-witted shyster lawyer!"

"Keep right on calling me names, if it will bring back your courage. What I think of you is now a part of the official records of this county."

"You go to hell!" snarled Wilson, pushing into the crowd. "I'll get you, and get you good!"

"At your service," replied the Snake Feeder sarcastically.

Gabriel White came up then to shake the Snake Feeder's hand warmly. Will Wilson had disappeared.

When I finished my dancing lesson, it was almost midnight, but I took a walk down town in the hope of encountering the Snake Feeder. I was curious to know where the boys got that money to pay back what they took, and I wanted to congratulate him on his victory.

What a lawyer he was! How subtle his strategy! While we thought he was doing nothing, he was taking the only course that could have saved Raymond, Paul, and Walter.

I reached the square just in time to see Gabriel White pick up a man who was lying in the gutter, so helpless that the marshal had to put him on his back. Gabriel didn't take him to the calaboose, however, but to the St. George Hotel.

The Snake Feeder was dead drunk!

XIV

In my eyes, Mamie Merrill was the prettiest girl at the Fleur de Lis dance. She was wearing her first evening dress—a little frock of some sort of light, diaphanous green material. It was cut just low enough in front to show the soft curve of her white throat, and the sleeves were short, allowing her well rounded arms to extend from them like the boughs of a silver birch. The pure agate glints in her brown eyes were never prettier, and the color in her face was not artificial.

Had she consented, I would have claimed every dance on her program, but she restricted me to four, including the first two-step and the "Home" waltz. While I was initialing her program and mine, others crowded around her, and the faint hope I had cherished that I might be allowed one more, vanished. Every number was taken before the music started.

But while I thought Mamie the prettiest girl on the floor, there were evidently others who gave that honor to Nelly Miller. She wore a pink dress, and at her belt were pink roses. I had sent carnations to Mamie, roses being beyond my allowance. Suspended from Nelly's left wrist was a pink satin fan tipped with feathers. Her black hair was piled high, and shining from its dark strands was a glittering jeweled comb. She looked like a queen, and Tom Spiers, a fine figure in his dress suit, held his head proudly as he escorted her in.

Charlie Mechant claimed Nelly's program immediately after Tom. He wanted two dances, but Nelly would only let him have one. There was a long line waiting their turn, and he finally quit pleading. I wasn't quite sure, but I suspected that, despite her refusal, he made two entries on her program. Instead of handing it back to her, he gave it, with her permission, to Squank, who was standing in the line just ahead of me.

Charlie had brought Edna Seena, a Bellefontaine girl. She was pretty, and her dress was becoming, but though he tried to make it appear that he was devoted to her, his eyes kept straying to Nelly Miller, even while he was filling Miss Seena's program.

I was a little nervous at the start, but that soon wore off. I had practiced diligently, not only at Mamie's house, but also when I was alone in my own room; only then, instead of a partner, I had a chair. The lights, the music, the well dressed young people all around me, the perfume in the air, the proximity of Mamie, all gave me confidence, and she complimented me as we stepped over the polished floor together. I could have danced with her forever, and it seemed as if the music had hardly started before it stopped.

A little pang of jealousy came over me when Dewey claimed her for the second dance, and I went after Maude Kaufman. Dewey had " stagged it," and was really fine-looking in his dress clothes. He acted as if he was comfortable, too — which I couldn't do, for my coat felt lonely in front and too heavy behind, while the high winged collar sawed my neck, and the new patent leathers hurt my feet.

Maude and I got along all right, but until the waltz I had with Mamie I only caught a smile from her now and then as she whirled by. That waltz was heavenly.

Midnight seemed to arrive almost in an instant, and then came an intermission and refreshments. When the orchestra started again, a two-step circle was announced, and Charlie Mechant called. It may have been simply a coincidence, but I thought that whenever he danced with Nelly it was a long time before he called a change. Possibly I only imagined that; but the circle was a failure in so far as I was concerned, because never once was Mamie my partner.

For the next dance Tom was Mamie's partner, and Edna Seena was mine. Nelly was sitting alone, with a strange flash in her eyes; nor did she smile at Tom, though he passed so closely that she must have seen him. Charlie Mechant wasn't dancing that number, either; but when it was almost a quarter over, he came over to Nelly, and she got up, flashing him a smile. In his arms she seemed to be having the best time in the world.

After that dance, whenever Tom came near, she ignored him completely, laughing and joking with Charlie or any one who was close enough. Tom had two more dances with her and they sat one out, neither saying anything, apparently. When the orchestra began to play " Home, Sweet Home," she sent him for her wraps; and before the number was concluded, they were gone.

It was three o'clock in the morning. In all my life there had never been such a short night!

Though we had had refreshments, we were hungry again, so Mamie and I and Squank and Maude decided to go to the Busy Bee for a little lunch. We asked Dewey to go with us, and he consented.

As the girls were with us, we didn't sit in front, on the high stools that lined the counter, but went into the dining room. We had given our order, and were chatting, when the Red Man came in. Flopping down on one of the stools, an odor of cheap whisky filling the place, he raised his thick voice to demand a sandwich.

Charlie Ross, the counter man, placed one before him. The Red Man took a bite from it and threw it into Ross's face.

" I wanted veal, not ham!" he snarled.

" Why didn't you ask for it, then?" inquired Charlie.

" I did."

" You only ordered a sandwich."

"Trying to make me out a liar, eh?"

The Red Man reached for a catsup bottle. I wished we hadn't come there. It looked like trouble, and I didn't want Mamie to see such things.

Charlie merely set out a veal sandwich, however. The Red Man ate it slowly, and then sat looking out of the window. He did not offer to pay, and Charlie did not remind him of the omission.

Our oysters arrived, and we forgot about him. While we were eating, we laughed and joked and had a good time.

"Cut out that yapping!"

The order came from the Red Man, who was framed in the doorway. Squank half rose, but Maude pulled him back.

"You pack of calves are enough to make a he-man sick!" he snarled, his red-rimmed eyes gleaming evilly. "For half a cent I'd throw you out. You ought to be home in bed. Guess I'll chase you there!"

He advanced, menace in his manner, and we saw that he again had the catsup bottle in his hand.

Just then the front door opened, and the Red Man's woman entered. She had evidently been waiting for him outside.

"Jim!" she said quietly. He turned toward her. "Jim, come on home!"

"To hell with you!" he answered sneeringly. "Who are you, trying to give me orders? For half a cent I'd knock you through this partition!"

He raised his arm, but the woman was not frightened.

Squank and I were out of our chairs before the girls could stop us, and Dewey was half a step ahead.

"Never mind," said the woman. "Don't pay any attention to him. I know how to handle him when he's in this condition."

While speaking, she looked us full in the face, the shawl that had replaced her sun bonnet having slipped back. Her eyes were large, and were like the pools at the foot of the river riffles, hazel in color, with something unreadable in their depths. Her hair, drawn straight back, was like gold floss. Her face had no color, but her features were regular. It was easy to see that she had been beautiful not long before, and that she would be so again, if she were dressed as Nelly Miller was for the dance.

Her voice awakened peculiar echoes within me. It was a rich, full contralto, with no suggestion of the masculine, but with a vibrant resonance that could not easily be forgotten.

"Let them come on," said the Red Man. "I'll knock the devil out of the three of 'em!"

We could see plainly, however, that he was not trying very strongly to break her hold on his arm. As we stood steadfast, he gave ground, still muttering and complaining, until she got him to the door, which was opened by Charlie Ross, and they went out into the night together.

"What a horrible man!" exclaimed Maude. "I wonder why a woman like her ever married such a beast!"

None of us could answer.

"There is something about her I don't like," said Mamie positively.

"What is it?" I inquired.

"I can't tell you, but I don't believe I could ever trust her. I think it is her eyes."

We finished our lunch, and Dewey excused himself. Squank and I engaged a hack to take the girls home. As Squank and Maude got out first, I held Mamie's hand until we reached her gate.

I took her to the door, and there she looked so lovely that I wanted to kiss her, but a painful memory held me back. She reminded me of one of Nelly Miller's pink roses as she stood there in her doorway and whispered:

"Good night!"

(*To be continued in the June number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE MIRACLES OF SPRING

AGAIN! Again! Again it is the spring,
Renewing miracles that make earth sing,
Repeating in my heart amazement's song
That in our world such blossomings belong.

To many gods have men and women knelt,
In many breasts have many wonders dwelt;
But who so sweet to worship or to sing
As this god who indulges us with spring?

Charles Divine

Out of His Class

AN EMPLOYEE OF THE UNIVERSAL CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTE INSISTS ON SEEING THE PRESIDENT

By J. Frank Davis

KENNETH WASHBURN finished his second cup of breakfast coffee, folded his napkin, went around the little table, and kissed Sally twice.

" That's once for each year," he said.

" I *knew* you hadn't forgotten what day it was!" she cried, relieved.

He plunged into his bad news. There was no way to break it gently.

" Sweetheart, I can't tell you how sorry I am, but I haven't bought the piano. We can't have it yet."

To his astonishment, she did not seem surprised.

" It's business, isn't it?" she said. " Tell me, Ken."

" There isn't much to tell, except that things have been dull for a couple of months. They'll be all right soon. Then, when we get the piano, we'll imagine it came to-day. It will be the wedding anniversary present, just the same."

" Ken," she said, " I'm just as well satisfied, because, if you haven't enough to get the piano—well, I hate to owe people, and we'll be able to pay all those bills now, won't we?"

He had never mentioned to her that he expected to pay for the instrument by installments. She thought it was a question of his not having the full price.

" Bills?" he laughed. " Don't you worry about bills!" He kissed her again. " You just take care of the house and Snooks. I'm the partner who does the worrying about bills, if there's any worrying to do—and there isn't."

The deep blue of her eyes clouded. This was by no means the first time that he had shut her out from participation in their joint business affairs.

" Mr. Nordley was here yesterday afternoon," she said. " I'd have told you last night, if I'd been awake when you came in. He says collections have been bad, and he just has to ask for the rent."

" I'll thank Nordley not to bother you about it!" Ken exclaimed. " I pay the rent at the office, and he knows it. Coming around here to collect, as if I were a tenant that wasn't good for it! By George, I'll give him a piece of my mind! Here it's only the 5th of the month—"

" It's last month's rent, he said," she put in timidly. " He said the agreement was to pay it in advance."

" I'll take care of it in a few days. Hereafter, if he wants us for tenants, he can do business at his office or mine."

" Ken!" she said, and caught her breath a little. It was hard to talk money with him. He always discouraged it; but while they were on the subject, she might as well have it over. " Ken, that twenty-five dollars you gave me for my birthday—I've been saving it until I could find just the kind of a wrist watch I want—would you mind if I bought a suit with it? Of course," she hastened to add, as two ominous lines gathered between his eyes, " you would make it up to me later, and I'd get the watch."

" A suit? You need a suit?"

" They are having marked down sales, and I can get a nice one for twenty-five dollars. I—it seems as if my clothes were all wearing out at once!"

" But I don't understand. Out of the money I've given you this month—"

Sally looked almost guilty, because she felt so.

" Dear!" she whispered. " You'll forgive me, but Mr. Mathewson—he was very polite; really he was, Ken; but he hasn't a very big grocery, you know, and not much money to run it with. He told me all about it; and he has to get along on a—a close credit margin."

Kenneth's tone was incredulous.

"You don't mean you've paid the grocery bill?"

"One month's bill. We couldn't get any more credit if we didn't. I gave it to him the day before yesterday. Forgive me for not telling you, but I could see you were so worried!"

"Really, I don't know why you should have thought I was so worried that I couldn't attend to my own bills," he said, ashamed, and therefore angry. "I shall tell Mathewson if he doesn't care enough about my trade to let me have a few days' extra time on a bill, there are other grocers who—"

"But he wasn't a bit unpleasant about it. He was just as nice! He acted as if he was worried, too. He's got three children, you know, and the oldest isn't seven—and it isn't a very big store."

"I wish you'd leave the handling of the bills to me!" Kenneth said impatiently.

She blinked a little. Trifling domestic spats they had gone through, of the kind that are chiefly memorable for the joy of being sorry and making it up, but he had never before spoken to her in quite that tone. Nevertheless, she replied bravely.

"Ken," she told him, "I'm going to say it now, and then I won't say it any more. Getting students for the Universal Correspondence Institute is your business. I've never asked anything about it that you didn't want to tell me, although I've wanted to, often—especially this last month, when you've been so worried about it; but our home is *our* business, isn't it, dear? If only I had a regular allowance—"

"Haven't we gone into that before?" he interrupted. "I don't believe in paying a wife wages, as if she were an employee. Whatever money you need for clothes and spending money—have I ever been stingy?"

"You've been perfectly generous!" she cried. "But, oh, Ken, you don't understand! I don't like to have to ask you for money. If there was a certain amount every week, and I could run the house out of it, and have what was left over for clothes, with something saved here and there, if I was economical enough, to put into little things like pictures and new table silver—you don't think I am extravagant, do you?"

"You're not extravagant," he admitted, but still coldly; "but paying the house bills—and worrying about them, if there's any worrying to do—is a man's business. Paying Mathewson was all right, of course, as you saw it, but after this I'd rather you would leave it to me to talk to him and Nordley and the rest. I'll see that the money you paid comes back to you as soon as I can. I haven't it this morning."

"And the suit?" she asked. "Will it be all right if I take that twenty-five and go down to-day to one of the sales—"

"Certainly not," he told her. "I didn't give you birthday money to buy clothes with. That twenty-five is wrist watch money. Within a few days I'll give you the money for the suit."

"Then why can't I use the money that I have now, and when you give me another twenty-five—"

"It's the principle of the thing!" he exclaimed in exasperation.

Before he could say more, an infantile wail came from their bedroom.

"Oh, dear!" cried Sally, as she hastily rose. "I wanted to get this settled, so we would never quarrel about it again!"

"We aren't quarreling," he told her from a superior height; "and it *is* settled. You'll have to trust me to attend to business matters. You don't need to think about them at all."

Kenneth was conscious, as Sally fled toward the almost profanely critical yells that were advertising Snooks's demand for the serving of his breakfast without further delay, that she also was about to weep. He left the house without kissing her good-by—the first time he had ever done so.

At the moment he said to himself that it wasn't necessary, for he already had kissed her several times that morning; but it bothered him all the way to the office. He admitted, as his unreasonable resentment wore off, that he had not been wholly fair. He decided that some day he would try to work out a plan for some sort of an allowance — not to include house running expenses, of course, but to provide for Sally's clothes and little odds and ends of furnishings.

He felt intense relief over the payment of the month-old grocery bill, but he couldn't help thinking about the suit that Sally needed. It humiliated him that she should want clothes which he couldn't promptly supply. This mustn't happen again. Rainy weather, hereafter, must never catch him without a mackintosh. When business picked up, he must try this thrift thing—

not fanatically, of course, but sufficiently to make it impossible for two or three months of bad business to wallop him.

His thought, as he sat down at his office desk and petulantly pushed aside a little stack of bills that he couldn't pay, was that he wished he had kept some of his money when he had it.

II

A BATTERED English philosopher once expressed the situation. His remarks, translated into terms of American currency at approximately the pre-war rate of exchange, were:

"Annual income, one hundred dollars; annual expenditure, ninety-nine dollars and eighty-eight cents; result, happiness. Annual income, one hundred dollars; annual expenditure, one hundred dollars and twelve cents; result, misery."

Being but twenty-six years old, and hence of a generation not especially well grounded in the English classics, Kenneth may never have read these words of the immortal *Micawber,* but his own experience was impressing the same conclusion upon him.

Only a few months ago he had been making, with salary and commissions, close to seventy dollars a week. Now, since everything had slumped, he was getting his salary of forty dollars and no commissions whatever, because commissions for a district superintendent of the Universal Correspondence Institute's field force depended upon all his subordinates writing a certain average of new business, and Kenneth's weren't doing it.

Furthermore, out of that salary he had been spending money in the attempt to pull things up. Only the night before he had spent twelve dollars, plus the waiter's tip, on an inspirational first-of-the-month dinner for his five assistant superintendents, by whose record he must succeed or fail.

That was the exasperating thing about it. He was utterly at their mercy, and three of them had been producing wretchedly; and yet, listening to their reasonable excuses, he hadn't had the heart to discharge any of them.

When he himself had been a solicitor, he had always been able to enroll a sufficient number of new students to satisfy the home office; but now, as an executive, his monthly record was the average of all his solicitors—and for the past two months their average had been atrocious.

A man might live with some small comfort on forty dollars a week, even with a wife and a seven-months-old baby, if he carefully planned for it; but Kenneth's little establishment had been planned to fit an income of somewhere around sixty dollars. He had been making about that when he and Sally decided they could afford to marry. Later, the weekly income had run up, occasionally, to seventy-five dollars, and once or twice to a hundred.

It was characteristic of Kenneth—in which he was by no means unique—that when for one week he made seventy-five dollars, he spoke of it to Sally as "about four thousand dollars a year." After the rare week when his income was a hundred, he thought of himself as a five-thousand-a-year man; and having felt like that, he had acted accordingly.

Thus the slump in business had caught him not only without a cent ahead, but with obligations blithely assumed on the five-thousand-dollar basis. Some of the creditors had been getting very unpleasant of late.

And this was hardly the worst of it. The hope that he had been cherishing of early promotion had become something out of the past to remember and regret.

Twenty "special representatives"—a new rank in the field organization—were to be appointed during the coming month. These men were to be the personal representatives of H. B. Tyler, president of the Correspondence Institute, their special duty being to interest the heads of great manufacturing corporations in the technical education spread by the school, so that they would indorse it to their ambitious employees. No minor workmen to talk to in that job, but big executives! It was a fine, man-sized position.

The salary of these special representatives was to be a hundred dollars a week, and they were to be selected from among the district superintendents. Kenneth had been hoping to qualify for consideration, but that was out of the question now. There was no slightest chance that old H. B. would pick a man whose district had averaged but six enrollments per solicitor for the past month. To be satisfactory, a superintendent was expected to average at least ten.

From his desk in the corner, after the morning mail had been opened and the solicitors had all gone out, Kenneth heard

Burt Halliwell, one of the two assistant superintendents whose headquarters were with him—the only two in the district who had been making good—exclaim to Reagan, the other:

"Listen to this wheeze! Here's a prospect that's just been forwarded from the home office. Our national advertising certainly does shake the nuts out of the trees!"

He read from a sheet of cheap note paper which, a little earlier, had passed through Kenneth's hands:

UNIVERSAL CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTE,
DEAR FREIND,

I see by the magazine about how you teach by mail to be different trades from what a fello are, so as to make bigger pay envelop and work in offis insted of shop and I would like to work in offis insted of shop becaus I am going to get marry and we will want bigger pay envelop. So pleas write me pleas how to lern to write letters on a tapparator writeing machine so I can work in offis insted of shop. I am a machinest apprentis now and the boss says I can be pretty good as machinest but I will rather work in offis.

Your freind,
MR. J. B. LAPLANTE.

Halliwell tossed the letter across to Reagan, who looked it over and remarked.

"Not a bad prospect, at that!"

"I'll have him enrolled in stenography and typewriting before to-morrow," Halliwell promised.

He was justifiably cheerful. The men of his division for the past three months had averaged the highest of the whole district; but Reagan frowned doubtfully.

"You know your own business," he said; "but if he was my prospect, I'd canvass him for either mechanical drawing or machine shop practice."

"Talk him out of what he has already decided he wants, and take a chance on being able to talk him into what he needs?" scoffed Halliwell. "Not any! Of course he'll never get anywhere with stenography, but an illiterate dumb-bell like him wouldn't get anywhere with anything."

"I don't think he is necessarily illiterate," said Reagan. "That 'J. B.' stands for 'Jean Baptiste.' That means he probably does most of his thinking in French. He may be able to read English fluently, though he's not up to writing it much. A man doesn't *draw* in any language. I think I'd talk to his boss, and if the boss would advise him to take up mechanical drawing—" Reagan looked across to the superintendent. "What do you think, Ken?" he inquired.

"Mechanical drawing or shop practice," Kenneth agreed promptly. "He's sure to fall down on anything else."

"But he wants what he wants, and that's stenography and typewriting," argued Halliwell. "His money will jingle just as pretty, whether he falls down or not. We don't know, for that matter, but he might get along as well at one thing as another, if he has ambition enough."

"Yes — Strangler Keppel had ambition enough," Reagan said.

Reagan's personal diversions were sporting. He seldom missed a fight night at the Business Men's Social Club. He amplified, the others not being as familiar with young athletes and their records as he:

"You probably saw in the papers what happened to the Strangler. The best wrestler of his weight in the country—but he wanted to cover too much territory. He thought he could be as good a fighter as he was a wrestler; so last week he tackled Benny Dolan, a third-rate pug, and got knocked for a row of Pompeian lava cans."

"What has that got to do with selling a scholarship to Jean Baptiste Laplante?" Halliwell demanded.

"Everything. It's a matter of class. Strangler Keppel went out of his, and got tipped over into the telegraph instruments. If he'd stuck to his game, which is wrestling, he'd still be unbeaten. With a course in stenography, this Jean Baptiste will fall so hard that the nightingales will still be singing to him when the referee gets through counting a hundred, and he'll knock the institute all the rest of his life. But sell him mechanical drawing—"

Reagan spread his hands to supply the obvious completion of the sentence.

"I think Jim is right," Kenneth put in.

Halliwell replied to his superior with too polite deference:

"If you order me to try to switch him from what he wants to what he doesn't want, I'll do it, of course; but what the home office asks for is total enrollments."

"I think you could probably land him in what he needs," Kenneth replied hesitatingly. "However — yes, we've certainly got to pull up the total this coming month, and we need to get an early start. We've all got to get up on our toes. That 'll do it!"

III

HALLIWELL and Reagan went out together shortly afterward. At the cigar stand in the ground floor lobby they stopped, and Halliwell, as he lighted up, sneered:

"Up on your toes, boys! The old bunk—but the false alarms are still holding their jobs, and business is rotten. How long before we say it with flowers?"

"Ken's a darned fine fellow, and he was a wonderful solicitor," murmured Reagan regretfully.

"'Was' is a word that's too long to interest old H. B.—it's got one more letter than 'is,'" Halliwell said. "The home office doesn't ask, 'Is he a good fellow?' but 'Is he getting the business?' When a good fellow slips, he looks exactly the same to H. B. as any other late deceased. You and I have to be interested in rising suns, not setting ones!"

"You are his logical successor."

"I suppose I am," Halliwell conceded. "Say, how would you like to transfer to my division? It's a better one than yours, and you'd have the same chance to make good for the district superintendency that I've had. You wouldn't make me mad working for it, because, with the way I'm going to run the district, by the time you get ready for my job I'll have a bigger one."

"That's mighty good of you," Reagan said. "I wonder what Ken will do! I don't know what else he's able to do. He's been with the institute ever since he got back from France, you know. I don't believe he's got anything saved, and there's a mighty fine wife and kid. You can almost include the wife as a kid, so far as that goes. She can't be much over twenty."

Halliwell's shoulders lifted and the corners of his mouth went down.

"Whether you've got a wife and kid, and whether you've soaked away any money—that's another pair of questions H. B. doesn't ask," he said. "Just two things the old man wants to know: 'Is he getting the business?' '*Can* he get the business?' If the answer is 'yes,' you stay. If the answer is 'no'—a sharp ax and a quick fade-out!"

"And when you're hitting 'em over the fence the grand stand yells, 'Oh, you bambino!' But when you fall into a slump, they holler, 'You big bum!'"

"Well, what's the matter with that? Every game is a survival of the fittest. I expect to get mine when I stop making good. Think over that idea of a transfer to my old division, Reagan. You don't write as much business as you would if you weren't so fussy about whether the students get their money's worth or not, but you and I can make a great team!"

Up in the office Kenneth Washburn was busy getting out an inspirational letter to his field force. He had written many such, and they hadn't produced results, but he hoped this one would. It must! A third month of bad business might be disastrous in more ways than lack of commissions. Within less than thirty days he must improve his record. Cool weather would be coming then, which always meant increased enrollments. If he could make this month moderately satisfactory—

The last afternoon mail proved him too greatly an optimist. It contained a letter from the home office.

His heart quickened a beat as he recognized it, for only on rare occasions did a district superintendent receive direct communications from the institute. Most of the orders and bulletins came through the State superintendent.

He ripped the envelope open. Its content was brutally brief:

DEAR SIR:

Owing to the unsatisfactory showing of business in District 26 for the past two months, I regret that I find it necessary to request your resignation, to take effect one week from to-day.

Yours truly,
H. B. TYLER, President.

Mechanically Kenneth put away the papers on his desk. He went out without speaking to any one, and walked all the way home. At the sound of his key in the door, Sally came flying into his arms.

"Dearest!" she cried. "Will you forgive me? I was horrid to fuss when you were so worried!"

"No, you weren't. It was my fault," he assured her. "I had a grouch, and things had been going to the dogs at the office." He led her to the davenport between the windows. "I might as well have it over," he blurted, trying to say it cheerfully. "One of the brightest young superintendents the U. C. I. ever had is about to look around for another job."

She sat back from him, her eyes startled.

"You mean—"

He nodded, smiling.

"'H. B.' stands for 'hard-boiled,' you know. I've had two months of bad business. I'm sure it would be better in another month, but old H. B. decided not to wait."

In all the two years of their married life, Kenneth had never explained so many details of his work as during the next five minutes.

"But, Ken," she suddenly cried, "you aren't going to take it, are you?"

"Take it? What do you mean?"

"When you sell scholarships, you don't let people off from enrolling just because they say they don't want to. You fight for the business, don't you?"

"I did," he said.

"You do," she corrected. "You ought to be able to fight just as hard for a job."

"I have," he told her, trying to make as light as possible of it; "but the enemy met me and I am hisn."

"Not necessarily," she protested. "Not unless you are a quitter—and you never were that. You're a salesman. Why don't you sell yourself to Mr. Tyler?"

"I did, and he's made me take the goods back—says they're not as advertised."

"Don't try to laugh it off, Ken. If you went to work on Mr. Tyler as you do on a man you want to sell a course to—as you'd go to work on these big corporation men if you'd got the promotion to special representative—he'd give you another chance."

"He'll come back at me with a letter advising me to apply to some assistant superintendent for a job as solicitor," he said. "That means starting all over again. Well, I can do that!"

"But you are not to write him. You would never sell scholarships writing to your prospects, would you? *See* him—to-morrow. Take the train to-night and go to the home office. You can be there before noon. Maybe he won't have filled your place before then."

"By George, I wonder!" cried Kenneth. "I couldn't go to-night," he added shamefacedly. "I'd have to wait until to-morrow, to raise a little money. I—I haven't got the price."

Her eyes widened.

"Not anywhere?"

"Not anywhere," he admitted. "I've been pretty foolish about money, I guess. I thought, when it was coming so easy, that it was going to keep on coming that way, or easier. We lived up to our income, and lately we've lived beyond it. Sweetheart, I've been sorry all day about this morning. When we get straightened out again—" In his humiliation and repentance he went farther than up to that moment he had thought of going. "When we get on our feet again, I'm going to let you try that allowance thing for the household expenses." His smile was rueful and a trifle bitter. "You couldn't possibly make a worse mess of it than I have!"

"You've done as well as anybody could," she defended. "You didn't know how it was coming out. Ken, how much money will it cost to go to the home office and get back?"

"With upper berths, and not extravagant meals, and perhaps a day at a hotel there, if the old man is hard to get at, thirty-five or forty dollars; and I've only got fifteen."

"Why, Ken!" she cried. "Isn't it lovely that you wouldn't let me buy that suit to-day? We've got my twenty-five!"

Kenneth swallowed hard. Damaged pride makes a terrible lump in the throat.

"I never heard of H. B.'s giving a busted superintendent another try," he said; "but that doesn't prove he mightn't, I suppose, if it were put up to him hard enough. Honey, when we get out of this, we're going to live on not more than forty or fifty dollars a week, and get a bank account!"

"You're a loveums!" cried Sally, forgetting for just five seconds to be old and dignified and serious and wise. "Mr. Tyler will give you another month's trial. He can't help it!"

IV

In Kenneth's hot upper berth, while the train roared through the night's mugginess, the influence of Sally's enthusiasm faded. He tossed, wide awake, and told himself that he was a fool on a fool's errand.

He had had his chance as an executive, and he had failed. True, he was as good a salesman as he had ever been, but salesmanship best demonstrated itself in the position of solicitor. The procedure for fallen executives who wished to remain with the Correspondence Institute was to ask an assistant superintendent for a chance to start at the bottom again. That was what H. B. would tell him. Why waste nearly forty dollars to hear it?

It wasn't money he was spending on this futile trip—it was Sally's suit. He was taking the clothes off his wife's back to try to correct the mistakes he never should have made. The car wheels clicked it:

"Sally's suit—Sally's suit—Sally's suit!"

He shut his eyes hard and clenched his teeth. It was bitterly humiliating that he, one of the best salesmen in the whole U. C. I. force—

If only he could have landed one of the new special representative places! Those would call for straight salesmanship—of a very high order, to be sure, but straight salesmanship only. A man wouldn't be at the mercy of subordinates.

Halliwell, no doubt, would get the superintendency. Yet his methods weren't always right. He would sell a course in stenography to a machinist apprentice who couldn't spell, like foolish Jean Baptiste Laplante, who knew he could succeed as a mechanic, but wanted to wear a white collar in the office. Out of his class! Another Strangler Keppel, who was a first-rate wrestler but not even a second-rate boxer!

"Out of his class—out of his class—out of his class!" sang the wheels.

"By George, that's what I did!" Ken exclaimed to himself.

A first-rate salesman who couldn't be a second-rate executive—a Strangler Keppel—a Jean Baptiste Laplante, unable to spell, but wanting to run a "tapparator writeing machine."

Jean Baptiste could never be a stenographer—at least, not without a lot more of fundamental education than he now had; but neither did he have to remain a machinist. With a course in mechanical drawing, he probably could become a draftsman, and might easily get to be a better money-earner than many a clerk. It would be a white-collar job, too. A man could stay in his class and yet better himself.

And then Kenneth's eyes came springing open as he had his great inspiration, which steadied itself into firm resolve. He viewed the thing from a dozen angles. Undoubtedly it had possibilities. By George, it could be made to work—with the right kind of salesmanship!

The chattering wheels, as he began to drowse, had forgotten Sally's suit and were clicking:

"Salesmanship — salesmanship — salesmanship—salesmanship!"

V

A WIDE-AWAKE, clean-shaven, well-brushed, surprisingly cheerful and confident Kenneth Washburn stepped up to the desk of H. B. Tyler's private secretary, just outside the door of H. B.'s private office.

The door was ajar, which might mean that H. B. was in there alone, or that he had stepped out.

"Good morning, Mr. Goldsmith," Kenneth said. "You may not remember me, but I'm Washburn, of District 26. I met you at the last superintendents' convention. When can I arrange to see Mr. Tyler for ten minutes?"

Goldsmith, who no doubt had dictated the letter demanding Ken's resignation, smiled noncommittally.

"Glad to see you again," he said. "You—er—you haven't an appointment, have you? Mr. Tyler's time is taken up—every minute—to-day."

"What time to-morrow?"

"Why—er—he's pretty well engaged to-morrow, too. Couldn't you write him a letter?"

Goldsmith's job, of course, included the duty of protecting H. B. from disagreeable interviews.

"No," Kenneth pleasantly replied. "I want to see him personally."

The private secretary's voice was not unkind, but it was definite.

"I'm afraid I can't arrange it."

"Oh, but I know you can!" Kenneth told him, still very courteous, but very positive. "There is a standing statement from this office that every member of our field force can always reach the president in person. I'm a member of the field force. I want to reach him, please!"

"Really, Mr. Washburn, it won't do any good," Goldsmith said. "It will only be unpleasant for both you and him. I can't arrange it."

"I am still superintendent of District 26, and I want to see the president," Ken insisted.

Suddenly H. B. appeared in his doorway. He was a short, wide-shouldered man of fifty odd, with a rim of gray hair about the back of his neck, and thick gray brush heaps over his eyes. His voice was harsh, his manner abrupt, his eyes unsmiling.

"Come in, Washburn," he growled. "We'll keep our word, even if it is your last week. Goldsmith was trying to make it easier for you. You won't need ten minutes. Five will do. Come in!"

He closed the door behind Kenneth and sat down behind his big flat desk, leaving the superintendent standing. He continued to talk without a break while he was going to his chair, and afterward.

"All right!" he rumbled. "To save time, let me say it. You have been district superintendent for six months. You did passably well for three, began to go behind for one, and the last two you've fallen flat. You have excuses. I've had a man quietly investigating, and I know every one of them. It's been hot. Some big shops have been shut down. One of your assistant superintendents let three of his men go, and wasn't able to break in the new ones. Another assistant superintendent had sickness on his staff. Another went to too many ball games on the company's time. You tried to pull them up with letters and inspiration and good intentions, but you didn't get the business. Now, Washburn, I work for this company, the same as you do. My bosses are the directors. They look at my business each month. They don't ask me how many of our fourteen hundred field men were hot, or sick, or going to ball games. They ask me how many enrollments we have averaged—what percentage of installment collections we have made—what dividends we are going to pay in October. Hard luck stories don't go with them. They can't go with me. Whether I'm sorry for the young fellow that falls down hasn't got anything to do with it. In this institution we get the business—or we get somebody that can get the business. I'm sorry to let you out, Washburn. You used to be good. We paid you for being good, didn't we? There's no reason why we should keep on paying you after you stop being good. Have I answered all the things you wanted to say?"

"Why, no," Kenneth replied, smiling.

"All right! I'll listen—for three minutes; but nothing you say can alter your past two months' record."

"My past two months' record is rotten," Ken told him. "I fell down. I have no excuses to make whatever." He dismissed the subject with a slight gesture. "Mr. Tyler," he said earnestly, exactly as if he had just entered the room and was stating his business to a stranger, "you are organizing a force of twenty special representatives. The qualifications for the job are a thorough knowledge of the institute and its courses, and of what it can do to make a workman worth more money to the corporation that employs him—plus intelligence, integrity, and ability as a salesman. I have all those things, and I shall be free from my present employment next Tuesday. I have come to you, Mr. Tyler, to apply for one of those special representative appointments."

"Well, I'll be cussed!" H. B. ejaculated. "You expect a promotion after—"

"Not at all, sir," Ken interrupted. "I shall be out of a job after next Monday, and I'm applying for a new one. You want the best men you can get for these new places, of course—and that means the best salesmen. I have failed as an executive, but that has nothing to do with what I have come to see you about, because your new special representatives will not have to handle other men. Whether they are good executives or not is of no importance. What you—and your directors—want to know is whether they can sell the institute to big corporation officials. I ask you to investigate my record as a solicitor, and the character of men I enrolled."

"I don't need to investigate that. I know the record of every man who ever made good with this company," H. B. broke in. "You were a good solicitor, Washburn. I had great hopes—well, I gave you your chance, and you failed."

"As an executive," Kenneth insisted; "but I'm just as good a solicitor as I ever was. What you are looking for in this new department is men who can make good as special representatives, not superintendents. Well, I can. That being the case, you aren't any more interested in what I've done during the past two months than you've been interested during the past two months in what I used to do a year ago. You want the goods delivered. I can deliver them, in any position where I'm not responsible for other men's work."

H. B. sat back in his chair. There was unbroken silence for as much as five seconds.

"You've—got—a—majestic—crust!" he said softly and admiringly. "With a nerve like that—" He patted a jutting chin with two fingers and came to a quick decision, as was his wont. "Well, you've sold yourself to me. You get a trial."

A hundred a week! Kenneth had an impulse to grab the president's puffy white fist, but enough sense to resist it. A U. C. I. subordinate would as soon think of kissing H. B. as of trying to shake hands with him uninvited.

He wanted to turn and run out of the room, to dash to the nearest telegraph office.

He wanted to whoop triumphantly; but he only said quietly:

"I'll make good. Thank you, sir."

"No thanks called for. There's no sentiment in this business. You can stay a day or two, now you're here—I'll allow your expenses — and get your instructions for the new work. Then get back, and turn your office over to Reagan."

"Reagan! I thought Halliwell—"

"Halliwell gets new business—a lot of it," H. B. grunted; "but his collections fall down. His business doesn't stick as it ought to. He's an able young man, but I swear I think he'd sell a course in textile designing to a plumber, if the plumber thought he wanted it. That's one of the things I liked about your record as a solicitor, Washburn. Your enrollments had class. If you ever could train subordinates to get business the way you used to get it yourself—"

Old H. B. stopped short and scowled.

"Now get out of here—I'm busy," he barked. "If you don't make good in the first month, don't come back here to tell me about it, because I won't see you. Great Cæsar's fits! The next time you'd probably try to talk me into making you vice president of the company!"

The Gold Brocade

THE STORY OF A UNIQUE SPECIMEN OF ORIENTAL ART

By Morgan Burke

IN such detached little communities as ours, minor things are likely to assume proportions inconsistent with their actual values. Life, however, has a queer way of letting minor things become major —often with a tragic magnitude.

The girl came out with Baxter as his daughter—and she may have been so, for all I know or care. If she wasn't, he took the subsequent events in a sporting fashion. If she was—well, that doesn't matter, either, because he withdrew from the story in its early stages, for the reason that there was nothing else to do. But the Australian who fell in love with her stayed to the finish—a finish that was permanent and final.

I do not wish, however, to feature the Australian especially, for, much as I admire Australians as a rule, this one was no hero, and would have drunk himself to death anyway. To tell the truth, when I come to think of it, nobody in the whole community appealed to me much.

Nice enough people, you know; but from the beginning one or another of them—sometimes several at a time—were sitting on my chest, so to speak, and I had too much else to do and think about to be the perpetual upholstered lounging place for other people's sorrows. This may sound cold-blooded, but it's a fact.

When it comes right down to it, I suppose, Baxter, the Britisher, was the best of the lot. When the episode of the girl who came out as his daughter was over, he withdrew with an admirable dignity, taking whatever tragedy was in his soul back to England. Garston, the American—my fellow countryman and all that — objectionable as he was, also had his magnificent moment. I'll say that much for him.

Of course, it was the old man who was actually responsible for the whole thing. The old man, you know, is the president of the company; but when you're twelve thousand miles away from the home office, a little thing like the president of the company becomes an indefinite being of pretty vague value.

The old man came out to Sumandra to look us over, and incidentally do a lot of sight-seeing with the gay crowd he brought with him. This served to establish him with us as a personage; but if there's anything in the world more demoralizing than a happy band of tourists on a big rubber plantation in the Far East, I don't know what it is.

The old man should have known better, but he didn't. He seemed to think that the intricate and laborious process of growing rubber could easily be performed during your off moments, as it were, and that the important function of all concerned during those six or eight weeks was merely to entertain him and his guests.

Unfortunately, it *was* agreeable to have something break the monotony of our lives. It was easy to fall into evil ways. One of our important and continuous duties was the difficult exercise of drinking the men to a systematic standstill—and a parched lot of birds they were. For the women, we were supposed to be clever and gay and frivolous on demand. All in all, with the work that had to be done, it was a strenuous period.

In our little community, which had grown up about the plantation, some of the fellows were married and had their wives with them, but the social life was pathetically restricted. You see, the wives of these fellows were nice women, but after all a little—well, gossipy, you know, not interested in anything much but their small, native-servanted bungalow households, and the babies they had or were going to have.

The dances at the Community Club were rather sad affairs. You couldn't very well dance a girl around a couple of times and then guide her through a window to the veranda and rough her a bit. You just couldn't do that, because she was always the wife of a friend of yours!

So, you see, when the old man and his gang arrived, we were automatically nicer to them than we should have been—which led to their staying longer than they should have stayed—which led to his meeting Baxter in India, and therefore to what happened to the Baxter girl and the whole blooming rest, as the Australian would say.

Naturally, the brunt was mine—all the brunts. For instance, the old man contracted the habit of calling me on the phone every morning about eleven o'clock, and demanding what we could do that day for excitement. Mildred Freeland—that was his daughter—thought it would be nice to load up the cars and have a picnic up on the mountain. Would it be too much of a trip to go down to the coast, camp out on the beach overnight, and come back the next day?

The prince, continued the old man, had asked Mildred to take a trip in his aëroplane over the island, and she was crazy to go. She certainly was! What did I think about it, her father asked? Remember, I had promised to come over to the courts for some tennis at four o'clock; and night after night there were the inevitable dances over at the Community Club.

That strenuous Mildred person was a young woman who could think up more things that had nothing to do with work than anybody I'd ever seen. As a consequence, I spent a good many late hours at night, attending to things neglected for daytime dalliance.

But some of the evenings were worth it. There were several attractive women in the old man's party, and the dancing was not so bad. As a matter of fact, I once or twice stumbled upon an opportunity to dance a girl out through a long window to the veranda—and she was nobody's wife, either!

Now up to the arrival of the crowd from the States, the Australian had already been an intermittent visitor for about a year. He was just one of those spoiled young men whose brilliant war record, family prestige, and financial standing had all contributed more or less to his delinquency. He had little other apparent excuse for being alive, except that he was good company when he was sober, even if he did have some of what the British call " swank " hidden inside of him.

The first time he came, I had invited him to be a guest at my bungalow; and forever after that he had drifted along and moved in on me whenever the annoying notion struck him. This might be a good place to mention that he was popular with the ladies.

So the girls of the old man's party had a pretty good time, with all the unmarried fellows starved for the sight of an unattached white woman—to say nothing of the Australian and the prince — to play around with.

I don't think I've explained about the prince. We called him the prince because his name was a double-jointed six-part affair, like the puzzling multiple arms of a Sumandran goddess. I never liked the fellow, but he was an important factor on the island, and had to be considered.

" Salve the prince " was one of the first things they had impressed on me when I went out there to take charge.

The prince, be it known, was a fascinating oriental, half white or thereabout, and the rest pure Malay, if such a thing is possible. His personal holdings were enormous, and to be the feudal lord of the island population was his divine heritage, with the title of sultan, I believe, but subject in a very elastic way to the Dutch government.

I know that our concession tax went partially to him and partially to the Dutch; and without his coöperation it would have been next to impossible for us to operate. It was his influence that kept the natives in hand. It was he who recruited our native labor.

Also, it was the prince who condescended to honor us with the magnificence of his society when he chose to come down out of his mountain fastness, and to give his European education a little exercise by associating with us of the Rubber Company.

I'm afraid, however, that we hardly gave that brilliant intellect of his even a workout. That is not satire, either. He was the most finished product of modern civilization that I ever hope to see. He had traveled the world over, and had studied it through his long, insolent eyes with a disconcertingly superb brain. I didn't like the fellow, but I had to hand it to him on that score.

He was difficult for me to talk to, because I always had the feeling that he knew what I was going to say before I said it. Moreover, I felt that he himself could have said it much better than I could. Imagine me trying to salve a bird like that!

The man could do anything! He spoke five or six languages other than his own. He had two aëroplanes and three cars, all of which he drove with reckless mastery. There wasn't a subject upon which he wasn't at least fairly well informed. He was a charming and interesting conversationalist; but I didn't *like* him.

He was slick, he was suave. His manner and address, as well as his dress, were faultless—too faultless. He had a slithering subtlety of humor, was gallant with a certain kind of courage and arrogant no end. He treated the natives like dogs, and they in turn loved and admired him as a god. Outside of all this, the prince was quite an ordinary person.

II

At last the old man and his party left for Europe, by way of India and the Suez Canal, without any casualties along the heart line that I know of. Of course, there was the girl that I'd danced out to the veranda and roughed a bit. You see, I'm not the kind of fellow that would even admit kissing the old man's daughter—let alone brag about it.

As I say, the casualties were slight, and we had got back again into our more or less regular and disciplined manner of working and living, when out comes Baxter and the girl who was supposed to be his daughter. I'm not saying she wasn't; but there were things, you understand—happenings, vague and all that, which a lot of the women—well, you know how women are.

The old man found Baxter in India, just returned after a long vacation in Europe. Baxter was, and I think still is, the world's greatest authority on rubber, all the way from the sprout to tires and heels. The old man borrowed him at a staggering figure, from the British company he was with, to come out to Sumandra and give us some advice.

What Baxter didn't know about rubber will never be discovered. He was a wizard. He was also a nice fellow—reserved, human; a fine, upstanding chap, well past forty-five, I should say. The girl, his daughter, was about the most startling beauty I've ever seen.

Well, our hearts all turned over again; but if there was any one thing that that beautiful Baxter girl knew how to do better than another, it was to keep them all bobbing and hopefully afloat—the hearts, I mean.

After the Baxters had been with us for a month or six weeks, the heart hopes had gradually drifted out of danger—that is, with the exception of the Australian. He looked just once at that lovely English girl, and never again came up for air. The industrious court he paid her was the finest discipline he'd ever had. He was wild about her.

Baxter looked on unmoved, knowing, I suppose, that his daughter could very capably handle her own heart affairs. If she wasn't his daughter, the situation was somewhat tragically different, and of course—well, which was which is anybody's opinion.

To outside eyes, the Australian's stock was what you'd call high. They were continuously together. They played tennis together, they rode together, they took drives together — in my roadster. They danced together, and they were a fine-looking combination.

There was every evidence of understanding between them. The whole community mind paired them as a matter of course.

Baxter said nothing. He treated the Australian with the same cordial reserve with which he treated me. Queer!

But I noticed one thing which failed to penetrate the sight of even those whose time was less exactingly taken up with rubber and the man Baxter himself. I noticed that when the prince was with us, the Australian was morose, and drank too much.

Although the prince was no more attentive to the beautiful Miss Baxter than he had been to the strenuous and fascinating Mildred Freeland, his attitude seemed to be different. There was more subtle significance in it. And she had a way, an insolent veiled way, of exchanging glances with the prince in which there was an intangible something that I could not understand. Of course, it was none of my business.

However, as I say, I was pretty much occupied in those days with Baxter himself —and with rubber. We spent many hours in my little laboratory. We spent more hours out of doors, riding, walking, investigating, selecting new jungles for clearance, looking toward just the proper drainage and transportation, and discussing a thousand details of rubber culture. To me, and to my rubber future, so to say, Baxter was a godsend. I certainly was glad the old man had discovered him.

Eventually the time came when I had absorbed about everything I could, and time and experience would have to do the rest; so Baxter began to plan their departure. This was all right, and I was expecting the Australian to make some announcement that would somewhat identify his plans with theirs. I was getting insufferably tired of the man as a permanent guest, and I hoped he would beat it off to England with them.

Then came the terrible thing that I had for a long time felt impending. I had not foreseen just that precise thing, you know, but I had had a heavy feeling that something tragic was under the jungle moon.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, the two of them, the Baxter girl and the Australian, started off in my car. This was not extraordinary, for they had done so several times before. However, the Australian did not come back for dinner. The swift darkness of the tropics fell, and still he had not returned. Eleven o'clock, and no Australian.

Motoring in the jungles of Sumandra after dark is anything but romantic. The roads are terrible, except a few that the company has built for its own transport; and I was worried—not about the girl, especially. She was at least twenty-five, and certainly was woman of the world enough to know what she was doing. I was worried about the *two* of them.

You never can tell what's going to happen up in the back country in that particular part of the world. The natives are utterly uncertain—likely to pull off almost any kind of an atrocity, given the right opportunity. The Australian was none too popular with the Sumandrans. He was too arrogant in his lordly, offhand way, and inclined to be overbearing, if not actually brutal, at times; and they can be vindictive, those mixed blood Malays.

Well, what happened was that along about daylight the Australian staggered into my bungalow, bloody and battered to a cannibal's taste. Don't forget that his getting there at all showed wonderful stamina and courage. It took me nearly an hour to get him revived enough to talk.

Of course, he hadn't had the whisper of a chance when they were attacked, about thirty miles from the plantation. When he came to, it was dark. He was lying at the side of the roadway, and the car was a smoldering ruin, utterly burned up, the chassis and engine still hot from the fire. The girl had disappeared. He had stumbled around in the dark, actually *hoping* to find her dead body; but she had been taken alive—there was no doubt about that.

So he had staggered back to us with four or five creese wounds in him and a battered skull. He had come back for help, he said. He had been afraid to stop at the two native villages along the road, for fear that they might be on the lookout for him and he couldn't get through; so he had edged around them through the jungle. How he found his way back at all is a mystery to me; but there he was, almost insane, gibbering over and over again:

"It's all my fault! It's all my fault!"

Of course it was his fault, the damned fool! I got busy on the phone, and got all the white men out. We organized three searching parties, and I took one of them myself. I phoned up into the hills to the prince, and explained the situation.

The prince was deeply pained, naturally, and promised faithfully to do everything in his power. Well, his power didn't seem to be worth a damn. In a week I realized that we were helpless.

The Dutch government headquarters sent up a detachment of native troops from the coast, under a Dutch lieutenant. They raided village after village, and couldn't find out a thing, even after killing off a few to give the others a scare. The only thing that did develop was that the girl's linen sport coat and one shoe were found five or six miles from the burned car. The coat was bloodstained, and had three jagged knife thrusts through the back.

Nice, pleasant little situation! Horrible, of course, and tragic! It played the devil with us all; but just think of Baxter! When I think of what that man Baxter must have gone through, I don't see how he kept his mind. It was easy for the Australian, even if it was his fault, because he was a raving maniac with fever. His mind torture didn't come till he began to get well.

However, it was impossible to divert the company's entire working force to the search for the girl's body indefinitely; and so, after two weeks, I had to give it up entirely. Baxter and I talked it over, and he agreed with me. He had aged a lot during those damnable days, and I never was so sorry for a man in my life. Whether she was his daughter or not—in either case it was bad enough. So, with that quiet, detached dignity of his, but with God knows what in his heart, Baxter departed from Sumandra.

III

I REGRET to say that the Australian got well, and became the greatest burden I ever had. What time he didn't spend drinking himself into oblivion he tried to use in telling me how sorry he was—how much he was suffering—that it was all his own fault—till I was almost crazy enough to kill him. I tried to get him to go back home, I tried everything I could think of to get rid of him, but it was no go. The Australian stayed.

He was still hanging around three months later, and I was a wreck from it all. During the whole time the prince was my only consolation. The whispering and gossip, mixed with cruel insinuations, that went on among the women of our little community was certainly a revelation; but the prince occasionally came down for a day or two, and greatly eased things for me by his calm and sympathetic attitude. The prince understood.

He also played a marvelous game of chess. It was, I think, our chief bond; and at night, over the board, it was a grateful thing to feel the prince's oriental poise.

Always somewhere in the offing staggered or lounged the Australian—always with a bottle near at hand—murmuring, mumbling drunkenly. It's hard to be sorry for a man like that.

The prince, with his slow, certain glance, would look over at the wreck and then back at me.

"That chap won't last long at this rate," he said once.

"No," I agreed. "If he were more of a man, he'd get out of here and get busy at something. There's nothing like occupation to keep a man's mind sanitary, in a case like that."

"The white man is a great puzzle to me," mused the prince.

"I guess we don't understand each other very well, prince," I said.

The prince smiled at me. He had a winning, white-toothed smile. I don't see why I couldn't like the fellow. I'm certain it wasn't because he wasn't white. I think I'm above prejudice of that sort; but in spite of his attractive personality, I just couldn't like him.

"Well," said the prince, "the separation is vague, but certain. For instance," he suggested tentatively, "you don't like me. You are a fair-minded man—I think you are the fairest-minded white man I've ever known—and yet you don't like me. Odd, isn't it?"

Not only was it odd, but it was disconcerting to have him say so with such directness. I just looked at him.

"Perhaps I don't trust you, prince," I admitted frankly.

"That must be it."

He was utterly calm, and his eyes traveled slowly toward the Australian.

I got his drift, which was to the effect that he was a better man than that by several thousand degrees, and that my feeling was stupid and illogical. He was right, damn him! It was his infernal way to be right!

My mind drifted to the Baxter girl, in relation to the disintegrated self of the Australian. I wondered if she had loved him at all. I asked the prince what he thought, just to see what he would say.

He laughed.

" If you'll pardon me, chief, I must say that you are delightfully simple-minded when it comes to women!"

Now what do you think of *that?* That's what he said; and he hadn't said it all.

" Actually, you're afraid of women," he went on. " That's why they like you. Women are strongly drawn to two kinds of men—the kind that is afraid of them—your kind—and the kind they themselves are afraid of."

His theory was interesting, except that I've never yet seen the woman that I was afraid of.

" But what about *her?"* I insisted.

" Oh!" he said, with a half smile. " Miss Baxter was so beautiful to look at that the other things about her got lost in the shuffle, as you say. You ask if she loved him, and I ask *could* she love him—or anybody? The heart of her was like a sun glass, in which love is not, but through which love shines to a focal burning point on the soul of her lover."

Queer chap, the prince—poetic, you know, and all that. So he thought I didn't know anything about women! Well, I noticed that *he* didn't make much headway with Mildred Freeland.

" Now take Miss Freeland," he went on. I nearly jumped out of my chair when he mentioned her, but he didn't seem to notice. " She is different—not so beautiful, perhaps, but what a soul! What magnificent vitality of soul!"

I almost believe the devil was on to me! Anyway, I played a better game of chess than he did.

" Yes "—his glance drifted down to the board between us—" you'll get a mate in about three moves."

Now what do you think of a bird like that? He must have been what they call psychic.

So, you see, even if I didn't very much like the prince, he was an abstract kind of amusement.

Then along came the fellow Garston, whom I mentioned some time ago. As I look at it now, I might have liked Garston, if I'd had a chance to know him better; but on the surface he was one of those cocksure hundred-percenters who travel through the world making themselves generally obnoxious.

He was with us only for a day or two. He brought a letter from the old man. His firm in New York dealt widely in oriental art, and Garston had come to Sumandra to buy up fine specimens of native workmanship. The best thing I could do for him was to send him up to the prince, who could open the island doors for him as no one else could.

Garston was gone about three weeks—quite uneventful weeks, with the Australian intermittently but consistently drunk. Consequently, I was bored to the state of being glad to see even Garston again when he returned. He arrived late in the afternoon, with that damnable freedom and assurance of his. I could never imagine the man ill or down in spirits. He was always annoyingly fit and exuberant.

However, as I said, he was a relief from the Australian, and I was pleased to see him. I had him dump his junk in an extra room, and the overflow on the veranda. He'd had a most successful trip, and was measurably enthusiastic. He would probably be successful at anything.

He bathed and shaved, and talked on and on of his adventures and experiences. The three of us sat down to dinner, the Australian lushing, as usual, so that by the time my boy cleared the table the fellow was pretty drunk. He slumped soddenly down in his chair and listened silently to Garston, who was a little windy, but diverting in his way.

" But the greatest thing of all!" grinned Garston, rising from his place at the table. " Excuse me while I get it."

With that he left the table and went into his room.

The Australian looked at me and winked ponderously.

" With all due respect to you, chief, I am compelled to observe that your countryman is—is—er—a distressing annoyance—most distressing. He's a talker, chief—continuous talker—*very* continuous."

Before I could say something clever and sarcastically significant, intimating how difficult it was to choose one's guests in the wilds of Sumandra, Garston returned. Drawing up a little smoking table beside him, he sat down again and opened up the brief case he had brought in. Out of it he drew a silken textile of some kind, and from its folds fell a creese—a Javanese dagger. The thing had a beautiful ebony handle inlaid with some kind of metal—brass, probably. As I drew it out of its scabbard, I couldn't help being fascinated by the wavering, escalloped flow of its tapering double-edged blade. A beautiful weapon, and a suggestively ghastly one!

Garston, rudely impatient, took it out of my hands.

"No, no!" he said. "That's nothing!" He tossed the creese over on the small smoking table at his side, and, with a triumphant exclamation, threw out the folds of the silken textile. "Look at *that!*" he cried dramatically.

But the dagger really interested me more. I'm afraid I don't properly appreciate artistic stuff—although I realized that Garston's textile was a thing of splendor in its way. It was woven of heavy purple silk threads, and gold brocaded, as I believe they call it, in an intricate and fascinating design.

The Sumandrans are noted for their fine textiles, and especially for their handling of gold thread in brocading. This was the finest piece I had ever seen. It was about a yard and a half wide and two yards long, and I remarked, as I held it in my hands, about the lightness of its weight. These gold brocades usually feel more or less heavy.

"Well," said Garston, with the gold brocade on the table in front of him, "there is an unusual story connected with this thing. I'm going to tell it to you—in confidence. You see," he grinned slyly, "my manner of obtaining it was somewhat open to question."

Now why is it, do you suppose, that the white man thinks it is perfectly legitimate to steal in any land but his own? It seems to be almost customary — accepted, you might say, in the best society; and although at times it makes me indignant, I am no reformer.

"This fellow you call the prince," went on Garston, "magically gave me the right of way through the whole island. I managed to pick up some rare stuff. I'll show it to you in the morning; but this gorgeous thing is something that came out of his own collection!"

When Garston said that, I began to get heart failure. I knew the prince, and I knew that this American would never be able to get away with anything stolen from him—not as long as the prince had his health.

Besides, think of the insufferable insolence of it! Why, he owed the entire success of his trip to the prince—had been his guest, and everything.

"You don't mean to say that you actually stole that brocade from the prince!" I protested.

"Oh, no!" grinned Garston. "Nothing so crude as that! I just bribed a boy of the household to follow me with it."

Good idea, that! Instead of stealing what you want yourself, just get somebody else to do it for you!

I didn't say anything.

"Well," Garston continued, "on my way back I stopped over with the prince, just to thank him for his assistance in making my trip a success; but the chap was so hospitable that I accepted his invitation to dinner, and to stay the night. He is an entertaining fellow, and knows more about oriental art than any one I've ever talked to, so you can imagine what a treat it was for me. We dined alone, and after that he took me into his private apartments in that rambling palace of his, and showed me his marvelous royal collection of Sumandran art. I wish I had that stuff in New York! It's worth a million dollars if it's worth a nickel.

"On the wall above his desk was this piece of gold brocade. As we stood looking at it, he told me that many of his textiles had been made by the craftswomen of the royal household, through the generations of his family. He said that this one had only just been completed. He referred to the general assumption that the work of to-day in the textile craft of his people was not up to the standard of the past, and proudly declared that any such assertion was absolutely refuted by this magnificent creation.

"At just about that minute I noticed that the prince looked up suddenly, and, as I followed his glance, I saw a woman coming through the portières from another room. I somehow gathered, on the instant, that he had not expected her there; but you know the prince. He covered up his surprise before he showed it, and she, on her first hesitating footstep, caught his drift and came forward with a little laugh. There was nothing extraordinary about it, I suppose, but the thing that startled me was that she was *white!*"

The Australian was pouring a drink, and so didn't get my look. I didn't know that the prince had a wife, white or otherwise, so Garston's last remark surprised me.

As a matter of fact, up to that minute it had never occurred to me to wonder whether the prince was married or not. These fellows usually have a native girl wife, or two or three; but whenever I had been up there at his place, there never was any woman in evidence. Orientals are sometimes queer about their families, and it's not a bad idea to stay off the subject; but naturally a fellow like Garston would be just the one to run into something like that.

"Well, what of it?" I demanded. "Why shouldn't he have a wife, and why shouldn't she be white?"

Queer that I should be defending the prince, when I didn't like the fellow, and never had liked him.

"Oh, nothing at all," replied Garston. "It sort of startled me—that's all. You see, she came toward us, and the prince said with a smile:

"'Do come in, my dear! I'm sorry you couldn't be with us at dinner. This is Mr. Garston, who has been collecting Sumandran works of art for his firm in New York. He has just been admiring your brocade.'

"She stood there leaning affectionately against the prince, and shook my hand with cordial grace.

"'You don't mean to say that *you* made this wonderful thing?' I said to her.

"She laughed and looked at the prince.

"'Well, you might say I did my part, Mr. Garston. Of course I never could have done the wonderful weaving, but I did furnish the gold.'

"With that she ran her two hands through her lovely golden bobbed hair. By all that's holy, can you beat *that?*" said Garston excitedly. "A purple and gold brocade—and the gold a woman's hair!"

I could not help looking over at the Australian, whose trembling hand had crept across the table to finger the brocade. Finally he stared out from under his heavy eyelids at Garston.

"Did you—by—by any chance hear him call her—the white woman with the golden hair—by her *name?*"

"Oh, yes! They were quite informal, and seemed to be very fond of each other. He called her Adèle."

Then what happened happened so fast that there was no time for thought, let alone action. The Australian suddenly straightened up in his chair and yanked the brocade across the table with a curse.

"You *lie!*" he snarled.

"You're drunk, you know," said Garston good-humoredly.

"I say you're a *liar!*"

"Look here," said Garston, with conversational evenness, "you're drunk. In the morning, when you're sober, if you care to repeat that, I'm quite willing to talk it over with you."

Before I could speak or move, the muzzle of the Australian's automatic rested on the table edge.

"You lie! Damn your soul and body, you lie!"

At the same instant there streamed across the table three spurts of flame, almost with a single crash.

About four inches above the table top three small red spots on Garston's white shirt front merged into one. He sank back in his chair, his surprised eyes intent on the Australian. He swallowed twice, as he sat there with a half sick smile on his face—an embarrassed sort of smile. Then, slowly, he rose.

His face twitching, the Australian was watching Garston curiously—watching him while he died.

Then an extraordinary thing happened. Garston was dead, do you understand?—dead on his feet; but suddenly the body of him, obeying the intent of the mind that had left it, plunged across the table with that Javanese creese in its hand!

Chair and all, the Australian went over backward, with Garston on top of him, and there was just one complaining, protesting groan as the sharp-pointed blade of the creese ripped its way up under his ribs and spitted his drunken heart.

As I say, it all happened so swiftly that I was powerless to stop it; and I'm not sure that I would have stopped it if I could. If any man ever got what was due him, that Australian did.

There they lay—all that was left of what might have been two good men. Garston, dead, lay on top of the dead Australian—and from between them the gold brocade trailed out over the floor. Think of it!

I stood there looking at that piece of purple silk, bright with the gold of a woman's hair, and wet with two men's blood. No wonder the prince doesn't understand the white man. I don't, myself; but I notice that he understood at least one white *woman* pretty well, damn him!

I never *did* like that fellow.

IV

WELL, that was that—the end, you might say, and yet not the end, exactly. As luck would have it, in another three months I was due for a holiday. I had passed up the last one, because I wanted to get the whole plantation scheme permanently established and organized before I left it for so long a time as a four months' furlough. This time, after three years of steady work, just as quick as the Lord would let me I hopped a boat for Manila, and thence for the U. S. A.

When I landed at Frisco, if I could have had my own way, I would have turned the continent of North America into rubber and stretched it north and south until I could step across it. That's how badly I wanted to get to New York!

Once in New York, I sent my stuff to the hotel and chased myself direct to the office. They told me that the old man had left word to send me in as soon as I arrived, so in I went. I believe he was glad to see me—not officially glad, you know, but personally glad, I mean.

He had just returned from a late lunch, and was in his most genial mood. He asked a lot of questions, and then suddenly said:

"By the way, chief, what about that Garston affair? His firm sent him out there on my recommendation. They've selected a lot of my oriental things for me, you see, and when I told them about Sumandra I practically suggested their sending some one out. Your report of that business was rather vague, you know."

"Well, sir, it was something that couldn't be fully explained in a report. It was too complicated."

"I thought as much. Let's have it," he said, looking at his watch.

So I told the old man the story from beginning to end. He got pretty warm with interest along toward the end.

"My God!" he yelped. "You don't mean to say they killed each other right there?"

"That's just what they did," I told him. "They lay in a heap on the floor, with that gold brocade trailing out from between them."

A greedy kind of excitement swept the old man out to sea in his imagination.

"My God!" he said again. "I'd give *anything* for that gold brocade! Purple—embroidered with the gold of a woman's hair—say—"

I dug down into my overcoat pocket and pitched the confounded thing over to him. I was pretty sick of it by that time.

He unfolded it with shaking hands, exclaiming rapturously:

"Beautiful! Gorgeous! Magnificent!"

But I wasn't looking at him by then. The door had just swung open to let in Mildred Freeland.

"Oh!" she apologized. "They said no one was here, dad."

"Come on in, Mildred — it's only the chief," he told her. "You remember the chief out in Sumandra?"

She came toward me with outstretched hand, smiling a queer, guilty little smile.

"Oh, yes!" she laughed — excitedly, I thought. "I have a very definite reason for remembering the chief!"

By this time I had hold of her hand.

"*Three* definite reasons," I corrected her.

"Well, three, then," she admitted; "but I had no reason to think that you remembered even one!"

Now the prince said I didn't know anything about women. He should have seen me then! With one competent motion I just pulled her up close to me, held her there, and kissed her—right before her father. I don't recall that she struggled much; but the old man just gulped and sat down hard, he was so much amazed.

Then, suddenly, he was conscious of the gold brocade in his hands. He shook it at me violently.

"Damn you, chief! This is bribery!"

"Well," I grinned at him over his daughter's head, "you said you'd give *anything*, didn't you?"

"Huh!" he grunted. "You think you're pretty clever, don't you? But let me tell you this—if you didn't know any more about rubber than you do about women, I'd fire you this minute! Why, that girl"—he pointed to the guilty-looking young person in question—"that feminine whiffet told me, the day we left Sumandra, that she was going to marry you, chief, if it was the last official act of her young life! And still you think you know something about women!"

Can you beat that? I guess the prince was right. Somehow or other I never did like that fellow.

Suspicion

THE STORY OF A FALSE ACCUSATION

By Reita Lambert

RICHARD SELLS sees little of his wife, who spends her time in quest of hectic pleasures with what she terms her "kennel of jazz hounds." When Della Sells sails for France with a party of her friends, her husband, disgusted with New York, seeks rest and quiet in the out-of-the-way village of Standish, close to the Connecticut shore of the Sound. Calling himself "Mr. Brown," and not revealing his social status, he is taken in as a boarder by Peter Stayton, a retired skipper, whose daughter keeps house for him. Dorcas Stayton is a gentle, attractive girl, and Richard finds her companionship very pleasant.

One evening, when Peter has gone on an errand to New London, Richard and Dorcas go out in the girl's skiff. Their boat is stranded on a rocky flat by the falling tide, and they do not get home until three o'clock in the morning. This is reported to Peter, on his return, by old Rose Ruby, a neighbor who sometimes helps Dorcas with her housework. Furiously angry, the old skipper jumps to the worst possible conclusion, and decides that only by forcing the stranger to marry Dorcas can he wipe out the disgrace inflicted upon his family. He prevails upon Mr. Beckwith, a clergyman of the village, to perform the ceremony without a license; and with a revolver in his pocket he holds Richard under threat of death while the clergyman officiates. Dazed and surprised, defenseless against the old man's furious passion, Richard offers no resistance; but as soon as he and the girl are alone together, he warns her that he is already married. Through a stormy night they keep watch together in the tower room of the Stayton house.

On that same day Della Sells is motoring along the coast of Brittany with Hal Dubose, a more than platonic admirer. Speeding around a dangerous turn in the road, their car plunges down a steep dune and crashes on the beach below, both of its occupants being killed.

XIV

IN spite of Peter Stayton's dark prophecies, dawn rode up the east with a brilliant outburst of color that laid a sheen of rouge over the storm-ravaged face of the country and filtered sportively through shuttered windows. Its glow on her eyelids awoke Dorcas, and she lifted her head stiffly.

There was no bewilderment in her eyes as they came to rest on Richard's face. She seemed, even in her fitful sleep, to have held him close in her consciousness, and morning brought with it an unblurred memory of all that had occurred—a clear sense of the tragic problem she faced.

Richard still slept, cuddling her hand against his cheek, and in his complete relaxation his face had taken on the wistful pathos of a weary child. As she looked at him, she was aware of a resurgent rush of that protective tenderness born last night of his helpless despair. It swept her own fears into the background, and left her more fiercely determined than ever to rise to his need.

It was when she gently drew her hand away that he awoke. He stared blankly at her for an instant, before realization flooded back to line and darken his face.

"Dorcas! Dorcas!"

"Yes, Richard, I'm here, and everything is all right. Everything is going to be all right." It was a defiant chant. "See, the sun is shining!"

He sat up, reaching for her hand again, as if for a tangible prop.

"I have been asleep. How could I sleep?"

"I have slept, too," she told him, sensing the self-reproach in his cry.

His eyes dropped to the wedding ring on her finger and clung there in terror.

"What are we going to do? What can I do?"

"Nothing, yet. We must think."

"Think!" he echoed. "I daren't. I must get away from here. I should have gone last night!"

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"No," she said firmly. "I couldn't have let you go then. I can't let you go now—like this."

"But the risk! They think we are married—your father, everybody. I have committed bigamy!"

She shook her head slowly, calming him with cool, steady eyes.

"You have voluntarily committed no sin," she reminded him. "*That* burden is father's!" she added, with a swift, terrible vehemence.

She crossed the room. One by one, she threw the blinds wide, and then opened the little door that gave upon the balcony, flushing the room with light. After a moment he followed her to the door, and stood beside her, looking across the swampy meadows to the blue reaches of water beyond. From the branches of the old horse-chestnut tree came a medley of bird voices, which blended with the fussy cough of engines sputtering importantly off to inspect pots and nets.

In the impassive immutability of nature there was a vague reassurance for them. How completely the sea and sky had recovered their serenity! The fierce tempest of the night before had left no more trace upon that bland tranquillity than had their own emotional upheaval. How trivial all human problems seem in comparison with the powers of nature! How unchanged the sea and the sky will be a hundred years from now!

Something of the same thought moved the girl to say musingly:

"It might be yesterday or the day before—or any day, mightn't it? Nothing is changed—out there!"

While Richard had only a bitter smile for that, she seemed to derive a fresh fund of hope from the thought.

"They know, all those strange forces out there, how things are with us."

"But," he said gently, "we are not dealing with all those strange forces, as you call them, dear. We are dealing with human minds—with all the little laws of men. According to these laws I have made you an outcast."

"No!" she denied hotly. "No—there must be a way out for us. There must be!"

He smiled wanly at the naïve cry. His racing thoughts flew to Della, came back to old Peter and to the village—which, by this time, must know of the hasty wedding in the tower—and to the girl herself, whose reputation would hang in shreds once the scandalmongers had found it a legitimate target for their relentless shots. He felt himself slipping once more into a panic of terror.

"I must get away," he said. "I must get away for your sake, Dorcas."

"No!" she said again. "If I let you go like this, I would feel that I had failed you when you needed me most. Think of the things they would say of you if you were to leave me now—so soon!" Her little doubled fists came up against her breast. "And if they spoke against you, I should kill them. My father—think what he would say, when it was he who caused it all! I couldn't bear that."

"But, Dorcas—"

"No!" she broke in hotly. "I can't let them talk against you, Richard, and not tell them the truth."

"But you can't tell them that, either."

His words lost themselves in unfathomable conjecture as he stared bleakly down into her eyes. It was not until a soft rapping on the door had been repeated for a third time that the sound penetrated their desolate absorption. It brought them back to face those grim realities whose unknown emissary had already arrived—the girl magnificently on the defensive, the man with the clenched teeth of desperation.

Dorcas went swiftly to the door and flung it wide. With the sickly green folds of the outdated dress still falling about her meager limbs, Rose Ruby stood on the threshold. She leered in at them with a sort of friendly camaraderie, her chin thrust forward, her bright, beady eyes flashing over the room with unconcealed relish.

"I thought," she purred with an ingratiating yellow grin, "ye'd mebbe like to have me bring yore breakfast up here!"

"Oh, then you stayed, Rose Ruby?" said the girl coldly.

"Yes, I stayed. Yore pa said he might be needin' me."

"Did father send you up here?"

The old woman shook her head, and her grin broadened. With her head cocked on one side, like a worldly wise cockatoo, she managed an elaborate wink.

"He's out lobsterin'; but I know brides. Warn't I one myself? An' I'd jest as lief bring it up—yore breakfast, I mean."

"No, no, thanks!" The girl's face was a painful scarlet, and she spoke to Richard over her shoulder, avoiding his eyes. "Will you come down when you're ready, Richard? I'll go ahead and attend to things."

The old woman fell back as Dorcas swept out, closing the door behind her. In the dim light of the stair well, her flaming eyes rested for an instant on that grinning old face.

"Go down! Don't come up here again —do you hear? Go down!"

Muttering plaintive excuses, Rose Ruby fumbled her way downstairs, but the fire of the girl's burning cheeks had filled her greedy soul with a warm glow. She was still nodding and cackling inaudibly when she entered the kitchen, to find Peter Stayton, booted to the hips, his visored cap drawn over his haggard face, fussing with the coffeepot on the stove. He whirled suspiciously at the sound of her steps, and, seeing that she was alone, spoke gruffly:

"Where ye been, Rose Ruby? I want my breakfast."

"It's nearly ready. I didn't know ye'd git back so quick. I went upstairs—"

"What fer?"

"I thought mebbe they'd be wantin' to eat up there."

He raised his fists and shook them above his head.

"Mind yore own business! Keep away from 'em, do ye hear? Ye stayed here to 'tend to my wants, not theirs, so leave 'em be! Hear?" Then, with a suppressed eagerness which he tried to cloak with scorn: "Where is she? Where's Dorcas, anyway?"

"She jest went into her own room. She's comin' down to breakfast, an' so's he."

"Oh, they be, eh? Comin' down, eh?"

Peter lapsed into an inarticulate mumbling, while the old woman scurried about, laying the table, and reduced to silence by his savage appearance.

He strode to the kitchen door, flung it wide, and stood there, tugging morosely at the ends of his ragged mustache. A moment later, his daughter's light step whipped him around. For an instant they stared at each other across the room and the peripatetic operations of the old woman in her flapping green gown.

"We-ell!" he sneered at last. "Ye've come down to breakfast, have ye? I should think ye'd have the decency to keep yore face hid till ye go!"

Her unwavering gaze clung to his face—unshaven, ravaged by the turbulence of his passion until it was scarcely recognizable. An overwhelming pity for him was in her eyes, but her silence, her still, white face, lashed him to more terrible virulence.

"An' *he's* comin' down, too, eh? Ye expect me to sit at table with him? By God, do ye think I'll stand fer that?"

"It doesn't matter whether you sit at table with us or not, father," she told him quietly. "Richard is coming down to breakfast, of course."

"Oh, of course, eh?"

For a moment his mouth worked uselessly, his very excess of passion clogging his words. The girl went quietly to the hook behind the door, and slipped the apron hanging there over the fresh linen frock she had just put on.

"Is the coffee ready, Rose Ruby?"

"Yes, it's ready, an' I made muffins an' hash."

"Have you had your own breakfast?"

The old woman nodded.

"Then suppose you run along and look after your chickens. They're probably waiting for their breakfast."

Peter's voice thundered over them.

"I told her to stop here!"

"But she's done all there is to do, father," said the girl calmly, and fixed Rose Ruby with her steady glance. "Go along, Rose Ruby. You don't want to fuss around in a kitchen with your best dress on, you know."

The old woman's greedy little eyes went speculatively from the glowering Peter to the girl's resolute eyes. Then she sidled cautiously to the door, while Peter fumbled frantically for a word that would preserve his appearance of authority.

"Yes, go!" he roared. "I want a word er two with the girl, alone. I'll come an' get ye when I need ye."

When the old woman had gone, Dorcas went quietly about her preparations for breakfast—turning the muffins out of their tin, bringing a platter for the hash, rearranging the knives and forks beside the plates. All the time she was acutely aware of the tempest raging in the gaunt, silent figure lounging against the door jamb.

"So ye think," he blurted at last, "that I'll sit down to the same table with that damned scoundrel, do ye?"

"I told you it didn't matter," she said evenly. "I'm going to ask you not to speak of Richard like that again, please."

"Ha!" he shouted. "So ye're goin' to ask me, please, eh? Well, ye can ask all ye want, but I guess I can say what I please in my own house! As long as that skunk's in my house—"

"As long as Richard is in your house, try to remember that it was you who kept him here, and treat him civilly."

"Sure it was me kept him here!" he blustered. "Ye got me to thank fer that!"

"Yes," she said. "We have you to thank for that."

Her ready concurrence irritated him oddly.

"He ain't in such a hurry to get away now, I notice! Now that his goose is cooked, he thinks he'll hang around a little longer, does he?" He laughed harshly. "But if ye think I'm goin' to break bread with that—"

She took a determined step toward him, her eyes and cheeks on fire, and his voice dwindled into inaudible mutterings.

"You don't have to eat breakfast with us, father, as I told you before. In fact, we would prefer to eat alone."

At that he pounded out of the house, took a few resolute steps down the path, came back, flung his hat on the floor, and, with a great clatter, jerked out his customary chair at the table and sat down.

"So that's your game, is it?" he thundered. "Tryin' to put me out of my own house, to scare me away from my own table, for him? We-ell, if ye think you're goin' to cheat me out of my own rights, ye think wrong, my girl!"

There was so much pathos, so much of the old lovable contrariety in the childish reversal, that her eyes swam for a moment in a hot mist of tears. The next moment, Richard's step on the stairs threw her into a nervous tremor. He came in, newly shaved, and with his hair sleeked back from his temples, like a little boy fresh from a doting mother's assiduous efforts. The ordeal of the night seemed to have washed the healthy tan from his skin and left him deadly pale, with eyes set in dark pools of shadow.

He stood hesitant in the doorway, his questioning gaze pinned to the girl. She smiled reassuringly across at him.

"Sit down, Richard! I'm just bringing the coffee."

Obediently he went to the table. For an embarrassed moment he stood there, staring doubtfully at the averted face of the old man, while he waited for Dorcas to take her place.

She went briskly about her serving and pouring.

"Hash, father?"

"What do ye think I set down fer—to be sociable?" he bellowed, and raised his eyes to glare venomously across at Richard. "Don't I always take hash?"

She served him in silence, though her lips were bloodless, in sharp contrast to Richard's purpling cheeks. The sun was flooding in at the windows, bringing with it a tang of warm, moist earth and rain-washed flowers. From the beach came the guttural chant of a fisherman bailing out his boat, but in the big kitchen a heavy, prophetic silence held the trio at the table. Once during the meal Dorcas leaned forward and touched Richard's arm lightly.

"You must eat," she whispered.

The old man, whose bloodshot eyes had followed the gesture, though her words had been inaudible, let out a derisive guffaw, which became an ostentatious cough under his daughter's swift glance.

Painfully ill at ease, holding himself in a vise of restraint, vaguely conscious that in some unaccountable manner he had been made to feel an infamous tyrant instead of the aggrieved and martyred parent he had pictured himself, Peter's resentment churned within him. The pale, serene face of the girl and Richard's tragic eyes clogged the imprecations that crowded in his throat, and he gulped them back with huge swallows of scalding coffee.

His cup was empty long before the others, but he refused a second with a furious wag of his head. He sat motionless, watching them from beneath his beetling brows, until they rose. Then he swaggered to the door, jabbed a toothpick between his lips, and, with a final glare of defiance, stumped across the lawn to the still swathed launch.

Dorcas had started automatically to clear the table, but she paused to follow that gaunt figure with her eyes. When it had disappeared, she turned to Richard, and her lips lifted in a tremulous smile. The despair in his eyes had deepened. He would have spoken, but for her hurried words:

"Why don't you go up and try to rest while I'm clearing up? Try to rest—and forget, until I come."

"Forget!" he echoed, but turned toward the hall door. It was as if he moved only in response to her voice. It was due to her whispered command that he had eaten and drunk. Now he looked back at her as if to gather from her encouraging smile sufficient strength to carry him up the stairs to the cluttered room in the tower.

XV

Dorcas watched him, and then turned almost eagerly back to her dishes. In the familiar, homely tasks of clearing the table, brushing the crumbs from the snowy cloth, sudsing the hot water until it flecked her arms with white foam—in all this there was a comforting sense of her everyday routine.

The thought of her father pottering about the rain-soaked launch added to this illusion, and, for a moment, the events of the past twenty-four hours took on the nebulous outlines of a half forgotten nightmare, so incompatible were they with the stolid tranquillity of the village—with the staid white house in which she had passed her uneventful life.

Yet upstairs, in the same room where he had made her his vows, waited the man she loved—the man who was linked irrevocably to another woman; and on her horizon hovered the dark, soundless wings of scandal. She fought off the panic that threatened her at the thought, and concentrated hardily on her work. She was drying her hands on the roller towel beside the sink, when a hearty voice boomed from the doorway.

"Well, well! How is the little housewife this morning?"

She turned to meet the clergyman's jovial smile, while the blood mounted in her cheeks and her breath came hot and short. He bustled over to her, all twinkling good humor.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Beckwith!"

"Of course it's good morning!" he declared. "How is the bride, how is the groom? I see you've not deserted us yet."

"No," she stammered. "No—we may not go to-day."

"Not go!" he blustered in mock dismay. "After getting me down here last night in a drowning downpour! Not go! Well, well"—with a light pat on her cheek—"I forgive you. Don't run away from us. We need a little happiness in this town, and what is there that spreads greater joy than a young couple just joined by God's own beneficent laws?" He glanced brightly around the kitchen. "Where is that young man of yours, anyhow?"

"In—upstairs in the tower," she faltered.

"Tower!" he ejaculated. "That far away already? Well, come along!" He captured her hand and drew her with him toward the door. "I want to have a look at the man who can put three flights of stairs between himself and his bride! Come along!"

She obeyed, powerless in the flow of that loquacious geniality. They climbed the stairs to the tune of Mr. Beckwith's irrepressible pleasantries.

"I knew the sun would be shining for you young folks to-day. How could it help shining? Bless my soul, what a climb this is! And your dad's out wooing lobsters, I expect, and bragging about his new son-in-law!"

When they started up the narrow flight leading to the tower, Dorcas hurried ahead. When she opened the door of the little room, her eyes alone caught the picture of that figure hunched in the rocker and looking desolately out to sea.

"Richard!" He leaped to his feet wildly, but before he could come to her she hurried on, trying desperately to conceal her anxiety. "We have a caller. Mr. Beckwith has come to see us."

"A caller—well, I should say!" broke in the clergyman's voice. He seemed to bounce into the room like a symbolic figure of benevolence operated by invisible cords. "I'm selfish enough to want a vicarious share in the joy of my young folks. How are you, Richard Sells, and, in the vernacular, how's the missis? But I don't need to ask."

He pumped Richard's hand with a fervor that threatened to lift him off his feet.

"I've just been telling your—ahem—wife that the sun can't resist a bride. It senses competition, and rushes out to look to its own laurels."

Richard summoned a strained smile and motioned the little man to a chair. Dorcas, her hands locked in helpless misery, dropped weakly down on the couch. Mr. Beckwith relaxed, panting from his climb, and his merry glance went to Richard, who was still standing uncertainly at the door.

"Come, come—don't mind me," he admonished. "Sit down, boy—sit down, and don't think you have to go out in the hall to do it. There's plenty of room beside that blushing damsel on the couch!" His laugh filled the room as Richard seated himself beside the girl. "That's right!

Now we're all comfy—all here in the same room, but with a difference, eh? The sun is shining, and you're man and wife. Well, well!" He wagged his head gravely. "You're about to desert us, I understand."

Richard steadied his quivering lips to reply:

"I must get back to town."

"It looks like it," observed the clergyman, with a glance at the half packed trunk. "That's why I hustled down here. I hope you don't mind an envious old man's butting in on you." He waited for the girl's forced smile, and, with a roguish wag of his head for Richard's silence, hurried on. "You see, your father got me all wrought up last night. He's an obstinate old fellow, Pete is. He would have the wedding now or never, and I came down here feeling mighty uncertain about things. I don't approve of hasty weddings. I like to take my young folks off in a corner beforehand, and give them one or two of my favorite homilies. I didn't have that chance with you two; but when I saw you together, I must admit that I felt a bit relieved. I said to myself, 'There's less frivolity and more righteous awe in the hearts of these young folks than one generally finds, nowadays.' That's what I said!"

He stopped a moment, his eyes lingering fondly on the girl's downcast head, and moving approvingly to Richard's white, ascetic face.

"It made me feel better to see that you didn't regard the thing as a joke, I can tell you. Just the same, I couldn't resist the temptation to come down and do a little postnuptial talking—especially since you're more my responsibility than most of my young couples." He beamed upon them. "I married you without the usual formality of a license, you see. It's my job to see you started off right."

The genial ring had gone from his voice, and a gentle solemnity had crept into it.

"You both know what a serious affair marriage is—I can see that. It's serious and holy, and there's probably nothing nearer heaven on this old earth than a happy marriage."

He leaned back in his chair, flung one short leg over the other, and fitted his fingers together, tip to tip. The familiar symphony of everyday, jog-trot activities rode in through the open windows; but in the room a sepulchral silence held the man and the girl on the couch, while Mr. Beckwith's kindly meditations formed themselves into words.

"I don't know you, Richard," he mused, his eyes still on his peaked fingers; "but I know a fine face when I see one. I know Dorcas. I knew her mother before her. An angel, *she* was—a fine, sterling angel in percale; and a beautiful woman, too. Did you know that your mother was beautiful, Dorcas?"

"Y-yes," she whispered. "I knew that."

"And good," he added softly. "She was everything she should be, without being dull. Some good women are dull, you know. Oh, I admit it, bless their souls; but your mother was beautiful and good and merry, like yourself. If she'd been here last night, she'd have danced and wept at the same time. That's the sort of woman your mother was!"

He drew in a deep breath and flung his arms wide, as if in submission to the inexplicable mysteries of life.

"But the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. She wouldn't have wept much, if she had known that her little daughter was going to be happy with the man she loved." He bent forward impulsively. "You *do* love him, Dorcas?"

The abrupt question brought the girl's head up as if the plump hand he extended had been placed beneath her chin. Her eyes were swimming as she nodded, and the effort it cost her to speak shook her body like an ague.

"I love him! I love him! I wish my mother were here, so that I could tell her—everything!"

"But she is, she is! You may be sure of that, my dear," he said fervently. "And Richard loves you—eh, young man? I like to hear it. Next to the Bible, no words were ever printed or spoken that were more beautiful—more sacred."

"I do!" From Richard's dry lips the declaration came with a fierce rush. "God knows I do! I would die for her—gladly. Perhaps—"

"Tut, tut!" blurted the little man, and fumbled for his handkerchief. "*Live* for her is what you mean, boy—and you've got something to live for, I tell you! Here you are standing on the threshold, with all life before you!" He blew his nose with terrible violence. "If I'm not mistaken, I'm seeing the consummation of an ideal love. It makes my old heart flutter to see you—two young people, happy, healthy, and in love! Dorcas here beautiful — oh, she's vain already, so I needn't mince words—and as pure and sweet as she is beautiful, and as brave as a sea captain's daughter ought to be! *That's* a heritage to bring a man, I tell you!" He stopped for a moment, to bask in the glow of his own gratification. "And you, Richard, city bred, but unspoiled, from what I can see, cultured, idealistic—a perfect union, I call it—perfect!"

He relaxed against the chair back and regarded them through a film of happy tears that he no longer tried to hide.

"And both of you as solemn and silent as a couple of well behaved youngsters in Sunday school!" He chuckled. "And here I am ranting on like this and making you miserable! But that's my way. I talk too much—always did. Dorcas, if that's a tear on your cheek, I'm going to make your husband spank you!"

She brushed her hand across her eyes—a hand that was mottled red and white from the grip in which its mate had held it.

"I didn't come down here to make you cry, little bride"—the jovial face was suddenly grave—"but a tear in time, as my mother used to say, saves ninety-nine. Better to shed them all now than later. Better to realize now that it's a serious step you've taken—you and your solemn young man here. He knows it, I'm sure. He's older than you—but not too much. He knows your problems don't begin and end with just you two." Mr. Beckwith's voice dropped to a reverent tenderness. "That's one of the things I wanted to speak to you about—those other little souls that God will send to bless you."

The girl's head drooped lower, to hide the crimson flood that swept up her throat and face, but Richard's cheeks were ashen, his eyes fixed in a trancelike stare.

"You aren't going to mind my talking like this when you know that I wouldn't sleep at night if I didn't get some of these things off my interfering old mind, will you? You'll be such a mother as your own mother was, Dorcas, my dear." His voice was very gentle now. "That's the culmination of a love like yours—children, new little souls and clean, vigorous bodies. They'll be something to be proud of, with the fine Stayton blood in their veins, and the fear of God and the beauty of love that you'll give them. Don't deny them, my young friends! Don't shut out those little voices! There are too many clamoring at closed gates and pushing their way through into godless, sordid existences because selfishness shuts them out of better places."

He bustled over to Dorcas and laid his hand lovingly on her shoulder.

"There, child, I'm through preaching. You'll forgive me. You'll know I talked because I loved you. I've loved you ever since the day you winked at me out of your mother's arms. You were a week old, then. I'm through now. You've only to be happy!"

He looked quizzically across at Richard, stroking the girl's hair softly as he spoke.

"You've got a prize here, boy, but somehow I feel you deserve it. Take care of her and make her happy—but of course you will!"

Richard got slowly to his feet and came slowly to the little man's side.

"I'm glad you came," he said quietly. "I shall feel that she can always come to you when—if she ever happened to need—some one who will understand."

"Me? She'll forget I ever existed, once she gets wrapped up in her own happy life; and she won't need me so long as she has you!" He laughed richly. "For that matter, my heart will always be ready for both of you—you're both my children, now."

He folded Richard's hand in his own warm clasp, and, after a moment, reached for the girl's and laid it on Richard's palm.

"I'm a happy old duffer this morning. You've made me happy—you two blessed young things."

With a gesture that was purged of its theatric flavor by the rugged sincerity that impelled it, he raised his free hand in an attitude of benediction above their heads.

"God bless you, my children, God bless you!"

The next instant he was gone.

XVI

Dorcas had not moved from her position on the couch. She still sat, her head drooping, her eyes on her locked fingers, the crimson flood ebbing from her cheeks, while she fought for self-command. She knew that Richard's eyes were upon her, and she sensed in his attitude some new, decisive change that made her feel infinitely removed from him.

"Dorcas dear!"

She raised her head, and their eyes met desolately. All her valiant courage had left her, and, bereft of this, she looked pathetically young and helpless. The vague outlines of the tragedy in which, for a few exalted hours, she had played such a heroic part had been filled in by the sentient words of the little parson. For the first time, perhaps, she was seeing clearly the immeasurable gulf that lay between her and the man she loved—the gulf her naïve hopes had leaped so determinedly. Now it yawned black and unfathomable before her.

Watching her, seeing the bleak apprehension in her face, Richard's own anguish was swallowed up in a great wave of compassion. With a tremendous effort he held himself away from her while he spoke.

"Dorcas dear, you see how it is. I must go. I can't stay on here and make you suffer like this!"

She shook her head sadly.

"I must go!" he repeated. "You see what my staying here would mean. Your father—Mr. Beckwith—presently there will be others. I must go some time, and better now, before I have hurt you any more."

She sprang to her feet, mutinying at last into hot rebellion.

"No, no!" she cried. "Richard, you can't leave me!"

"I must!"

"No!" she cried again, and then, with a hopeless sob: "Oh, why, *why* did this have to happen to us, Richard? Why?"

She was facing him, but the question was flung at the erratic fates whose grim caprices she only now discerned. Mutinous, defiant, she flung the challenge to those enigmatic sisters.

"Richard, Richard, why did this thing happen to us?"

He flung back his head, as if to add his own importunity to hers.

"Yes, why?" he echoed. "But it has happened, and it is all my fault."

"*Your* fault?"

"I shouldn't have let myself love you. I shouldn't have let myself submit to that ghastly thing last night. I should have died first! I've brought all this on you, when God knows I would have given my life to prevent it!"

"And whose fault is it, then, that I love you?"

He stepped back from the overwhelming appeal of that little, immature figure so close to his own, with the defiant demand hanging on her white lips.

"Who knows but that is my fault, too? Perhaps, if I had gone away—"

"And left me to discover it, after you had gone?" she cried. "Oh, no, Richard! Love doesn't come because we will it." Her lips were trembling now. Like a dazed child that has bruised its body in futile batterings at a closed door, and at last resorts to supplicating entreaty, she lifted her brimming eyes to his. "And *you* love me, Richard! You didn't will that!"

"Oh, my God, my God!" He flung an arm across his eyes to shut her out. "Don't let me say it again, when it can be only sacrilege!"

"But you *do!*" she whispered. "Whether you say it or not, Richard, it is there!"

He looked down at her then, and there was a terrible calm in his eyes.

"Yes," he admitted. "Yes, it is there—my love for you—the only sacred love I have ever known. It has become so much a part of me that if it were taken away from me now, I should be an empty shell. You see, I feel as if you had always been with me, as if the ideals that I've been fighting for all these years had been your voice speaking to me. You are so much a part of me that I didn't know it was you I loved, until the other night. I only knew that life had suddenly grown very beautiful and tender and pure; and all the time it was you—you—you!"

His voice was athrob. Dorcas was listening, so white, so quiet, that she might have died there, an exquisite memorial to their passion.

"When I found that I loved you, I planned to go away and carry my memory of you with me, like a torch; but I didn't reckon with fate. I never dreamed that you could love me, or that my love could hurt you!"

"I know that, Richard, I know that!" she whispered.

"But it has hurt you, and it will hurt you more if I stay."

"It wasn't your love that hurt me. It was the evil in other minds."

"And the evil is still there," he said. "I must go before it can hurt you any more. The longer I stay now, the greater the risk we run. Do you see?"

She nodded, but her chin and lips were trembling.

"Oh, Richard, must you go—and leave me—now?"

With an inarticulate cry he caught her

to him and held her close, while his haggard eyes lifted in a voiceless prayer for strength.

"Don't, don't cry, my darling! Don't cry!"

"Oh, you can't leave me here alone, Richard!"

"I *must!*" he breathed.

"Then"—she drew off, though her hands still clung to him desperately—"then take me with you!"

The appeal shook him as nothing else had done. It left him trembling, insensible, for a moment, of everything save the moving beauty of that surrender. He looked into her tortured little face, and saw that she had spoken with the impulse of an artless child. He knew that her appeal had been made in the same blind faith which had swept her through the ordeal of the wedding, which had withstood the ghastly disclosure of his letter. With an uprush of tenderness he drew her back against his breast.

"Take you! Ah, my darling, you don't know what you are saying! Don't you realize what it would mean to me if I might—honorably? If that ring on your blessed finger meant what it should mean — that you were mine—*mine!* Don't you suppose I saw what I had forfeited when the minister was talking just now? What heaven it would be if we might go on together, side by side, and some day, perhaps, might know that other happiness he spoke of?"

To have glimpsed that for a moment, and then to have it shown him again by her surrender, left the darkness about him more impenetrable than before.

"But—but what shall I do, if you go and leave me?"

"And what shall *I* do, leaving you—leaving you like this?"

The words were borne away on a vast sea of futility, leaving them clinging together on the floundering raft of their grief. For countless moments they stood thus, until he said again:

"I must go!"

"Not yet, Richard—not yet!"

"When I leave you, I leave everything. There is nothing in life for me but you; yet I must go and leave you."

"What shall I do?" she sobbed. "I love you!"

"I love you," he said. "I love you, and you're here in my arms, yet I haven't the right to kiss your tears away."

Her head sank lower on his breast.

"You won't go to-day—not to-day?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear, how can I go—ever?"

"But you must," she said, and neither saw the pathos of that swift reversal.

It was old Peter's stamp on the stairs that tore them apart. A guilty crimson flooded their faces as, with a peremptory tap on the door, he let himself into the little room.

The rage which had found no outlet at breakfast, the fermenting fury which was so much more devastating since it had been muted, seemed almost to have dehumanized his face. He had pawed and pulled so heedlessly at his shaggy brows that the straggling fringe almost hid his little bloodshot eyes. His hair and his ragged mustache were in the wildest confusion, as if, like some vindictive Æolus, he had released the winds from their caves only to have them turn upon himself. He stood, still in his long boots, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, rocking gently from heel to toe as he glowered at them.

Something of the girl's defiance returned as she saw him come in, and she spoke evenly.

"Are you looking for me, father?"

"Am I lookin' fer ye?" he mocked. "I'm lookin' fer somebody to get my dinner. Ye sent Rose Ruby off, an' then ye come up here to spoon and to soft-soap the parson when he come to call and give ye his blessin'!"

"I'll come down, father."

But this was not what he wanted. He hurried on as if she had not spoken.

"I saw him goin' out after ye'd got through with him. He was usin' his best pulpit talk on me, tellin' me what a fine son-in-law I had. I wanted to laugh in his face. Do ye think he'd 'a' wanted to come an' see ye if he knew why ye got married?"

"Is this what you came up to say, father?"

"Only some of it," he roared, his fury rising at her tone. "He told me it was likely ye wouldn't be leavin' me to-day. We-ell, I come up to tell ye the sooner ye leave, the better pleased I'll be. I don't want no wantons in my house!"

Richard sprang forward at the words.

"That's enough, Mr. Stayton! We'll have no more words like that! My God, how can you? You're her father!"

"I ain't! I won't own to it!"

"Whether you own to it or not, she's your daughter. You must be mad!"

"I be," bellowed the old man; "mad as a March hare, and who wouldn't be? The Good Book says there's hope fer a repentant sinner, but is *she* repentant? Look at her, and yourself, too—after what ye've done! If you'd confessed your wrongdoin' an' asked my fergiveness, I'd 'a' granted it!" Peter was speaking to the girl alone now. "But ye can go now—do ye hear? Ye can go out of my house. I don't want no—"

"Wait! Don't say any more until I've warned you!" The white passion of the younger man was in startling contrast to the distorted face of old Peter. "I warn you that if you say another word against your daughter, I shall forget you are her father! I shall treat you as I would any other offensive old man!"

"And who are ye, that ye think ye can talk to me like that?" sneered the old man.

"Who I am doesn't matter. The point is that the girl is under my protection right now, and I propose to defend her with every ounce of strength in my body. You can't defile her!"

"I guess I can say what I please in my own house, an' as long as you're under my roof—"

"Whether we are under your roof or not, we are in the room hallowed by that ceremony last night. It was the room you chose, and while Dorcas is here it shall be inviolate!"

"Ha!" roared the old man, maddened beyond all control. "Fine talk—as good as a actor on the stage! That's the way they do it! You're good at fine talk!"

Richard leaped to the door and flung it open.

"Get out!" he commanded. "Stay out until you've come to your senses! You have caused enough trouble in this room. Now get out of it!"

Peter backed falteringly through the doorway, while surprise mingled comically with the rage in his old eyes.

"Threaten me, will ye?" he roared. "Threaten me—an' she let ye! So I've caused trouble fer ye, have I? We-ell, I'll be causin' more if ye don't get out. Once I let loose on ye—"

But the door swung to on the old man's imprecations.

Richard sank back against the panels, his anger snuffed out as swiftly as it had flamed into life, his distrait gaze on the girl crumpled up on the couch.

XVII

In far-away France another sunset was staging a pageant over the white sand dunes of the Breton coast, bejeweling the clustered plaster cottages, firing rusty sails into vagrant flames, so that home-coming fishermen rode into port like the bloody victors of some miniature armada. Along the beach the shrill, gay voices of women mingled with the placid tones of their husbands recounting the day's adventures.

Scrambling exuberantly over a formless pile of débris, whose blue and nickel sheen had already fed its bright luster to the avid tongues of the tide, a group of barefoot children reaped a harvest of novel delights from the shattered car.

The man whose horrified eyes had chanced to witness the accident of the night before had risen to a pinnacle of popularity, and, like all astute celebrities, he was making the most of this transitory distinction. If he had, at the moment, displayed any natural human weakness in regard to the horrific spectacle, he had forgotten that fact. The whole community had forgotten it. His *savoir faire* had been so completely restored, as soon as he discovered that he was an object of awed admiration, that any such mean supposition appeared ridiculous.

In retrospect, his own participation in the fearful calamity lent his oft repeated narrative a dramatic glow. To-night his little court had gathered to hear the tale again, and it was a tale embellished by a native imagination and encouraged by the gaping mouths of his listeners.

"Like a blue comet it came," he was saying; "like a piece of the blue heavens themselves, whirling and roaring. When I saw what was bound to happen, I shouted to them to turn, but "—this was accompanied by a hopeless shrug of his sturdy shoulders —" of what use is a man's voice against the infernal roar of the devil's own machine? 'Mark my words,' I have often said to Simone, 'they are the invention of the devil himself, these motors!' And so they are. The devil knows a man cannot receive extreme unction in a flying motor!"

As the logic of this was incontrovertible, it was received with murmurs of approval.

"The woman knew," proceeded the narrator sagely. "Poor soul, I heard her last scream plainly! 'Good God,' she cried, 'preserve my soul from hell!' Those were her words, as I tell you. I heard them plainly."

"But, Jules, they say the woman was an American. How could you understand what she said?"

"Perhaps she was," nodded Jules; "but at such a moment God himself would put the words into her mouth, and what would He put there but French words, my friend?"

"And the man—he said nothing?"

"Not one word," said Jules, after a moment of meditation. "It is my opinion that the man was already dead at the wheel, or how should he have missed the turn in the road?"

"Perhaps he was not looking at the road," slyly suggested one Henri Deffand, whose reputation as a dashing cosmopolite was built upon a week's sojourn in Paris some twenty years before. "They were from Paris, that much is known of a certainty, and—well, perhaps the man was not looking at the wheel."

But the inspired Jules, who saw in this remark a tentative inroad on his own territory, frowned the suggestion down darkly.

"It is my opinion that the man was already dead at the wheel," he declared severely. "All Parisians are not the *mauvais sujets* our acquaintance with *one* of them might suggest!"

This settled the ambitious Henri, and placed the hero more firmly than ever on his pedestal.

Later, he was called upon to repeat his story to a little group of grave officials in the neat parlor of the *mairie,* which stood back beneath tall poplars on the main street of the town. The glassed flowers, the richly betasseled "parlor suite," the crucifix above the open Bible in the corner, lent the primitive inquest a cozy and intimate color. With the doctor's approval, the mayor himself pronounced the two unfortunates dead. Jules's evidence—not quite so glibly given as before his admiring cluster of satellites on the beach—determined the nature of their untimely demise.

Moving with the leisurely caution that distinguishes legal matters in a small French town, the accident was duly recognized as such, and plans were devised to remove the débris on the sands in due course. An astute observer had discovered the one clue that would identify the woman with Paris—three initials inside the silver cigarette case, along with the name of a famous jeweler on the Rue de la Paix.

This discovery had been a source of relief to the officials, for it tended to shift the responsibility of the two bodies — lying temporarily in a dark little back room of the *mairie*—to more adequate shoulders. To this end, it was determined to dispatch a messenger to the metropolis by the evening train.

This much accomplished, a prayer for the unshriven souls of the dead was timidly suggested by the mayor's wife, who was a pious soul. Jules's graphic repetition of the dead woman's last appeal removed a prevalent doubt as to her religious status, and the priest was sent for.

"Even if they were not of our faith," ventured the pious little woman, "the good Lord will read our hearts and accept our petition—of that I am sure!"

The small company crossed themselves in deference to these worthy sentiments, and their awed whispers subsided as Father Gaillard was ushered in in his cassock and stole, his jovial red face sobered by the solemnity of the occasion. They knelt reverently as the candles were lighted beneath the little crucifix—the mayor and his pious little wife, with her high stomach and thin topknot; the fisherman Jules, already in the throes of remorse that he had expurgated his story of its most dramatic features; *monsieur* the doctor, whose grisly task it had been to superintend the removal of that human residue, and to ascertain that his little kit of tools and bottles would not serve him here; *madame* the doctor's wife, who was the best possible advertisement for her husband, since she was never ill; and the venerable *gendarme* of the town, in whose uneventful life the unprecedented calamity had caused so much excitement that he considered it in the nature of a dire prophecy.

Over them all, as they knelt in the gaudy little room, lay the unspoken horror of those two grim forms so shattered, so still, so close to them in the dark office. The priest's voice flowed gently over them:

"Requiem eternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat—"

The prayer for eternal rest and perpetual light! The words droned with hypnotic monotony from the lips of the plump, pink little priest. The lamp, whose bowl was a bright imitation of a cracked egg, with a trio of cupids holding up the cloudy shade, mingled its light with the feeble flicker of the candles, and the click of rosaries played an accompaniment to the solemn words.

"Come to their assistance, ye saints of God! Come to meet them, ye angels of the Lord!"

It was the devout petition of the simple folk in the little town three thousand miles from the tinsel and glitter of Broadway, in behalf of the blithe and cynical soul of Della Sells and her frustrated lover.

XVIII

When Peter Stayton stumbled down the tower stairs and into the sunny kitchen, his passion became a devouring flame. That short and terrible encounter with the man he hated had swept away the final remnants of his control. He sought his old place on the doorstep beneath the climbing morning glories, and sat down with his knees hunched up beneath his chin, his eyes fixed sightlessly before him.

All his brooding resentment had focalized on Richard—the man who had robbed first his daughter and then himself, the man for whom she had broken the fifth commandment after nearly a score of dutiful, devoted years. For him she had turned against her own father, who had tried only to save her from disgrace; but it was the man's fault, not the girl's. He had poisoned her against her own father, so that she had stood by and seen the old man ordered from his own house—had permitted the door to be slammed in his face!

That memory was more bitter than all others. Again and again it recurred on the eroding tide of his wrath—a terrible, significant bit of débris from the shipwreck of his reason. Well, he had told the girl that she must go. Pride would never permit her to stay after that. She would be going presently—with *him*. She might even be happy!

The thought sent Peter back in retrospect through the vistas of the pleasant, uneventful years behind him—to Dorcas as she had been before the stranger had come, lovely, gracious, contented, with her tender smile and irrepressible buoyancy; farther back to Dorcas with her long, bright hair trailing down her back in thick ropes, scolding her father for preferring his stocking feet to the splendid new slippers she had bought him with her carefully hoarded pin money; to Dorcas making her first batch of bread under the tutelage of Rose Ruby; to Dorcas, plump and sober, stumbling after him in the garden on short, fat legs that *would* wander off into his pet melon vines.

Dorcas, Dorcas, Dorcas! His baby—his life! Beside those years with her, his seafaring years faded into a drab shadow; and now she had turned against him for a stranger—a puny landlubber, a lying, oily scoundrel!

The noonday sun poured relentlessly through the latticework above him full on his brooding face, and rode slowly westward, leaving him in checkered shade; but he was unconscious of everything save his gloomy thoughts.

It was Rose Ruby who roused him. She came stealthily around a corner of the house, walking on the grass, so that the crunch of pebbles on the walk should not announce her approach. Her face was thrust forward, as if her halting steps could not keep pace with the avid gallop of her curiosity. The green dress had been put carefully by for another state occasion, and in her fringed shawl and rusty black skirt she had the appearance of a sublimated scarecrow.

She paused at sight of the crouching figure on the doorstep. So silently had she come that Peter was unaware of her presence until she was almost upon him. Then he reared his head and gave her a malevolent glance.

"We-ell! What d'ye want?"

"Nothin'," she said. "Had your dinner?"

"Dinner!" he echoed vaguely.

She nodded, and peered beyond him into the immaculate kitchen.

"Ye mean to say ye ain't had nothin' since breakfast?"

"No—don't want nothin'."

"An' here it is the middle of the afternoon!" Her yellow smile shone forth, slyly triumphant. "I told ye ye'd be needin' me. Brides ain't reliable, *I* say!"

His only response to that was a low grunt. She went past him—a trifle timidly, for his face was a fearsome thing to see—into the kitchen, and lifted off the lid of the stove. He heard her clucking her tongue in pleased disapproval over the cold fire box and rummaging noisily in the wood bin.

"I'll make ye a cup of tea," she told him.

"I don't want nothin' to eat," he said.

Ignoring his refusal, she went on with her tasks, filling the kettle, taking down a cup and saucer from the shelf, cutting thick slices of bread.

"*They* don't need food," she said with a chuckle; "but you're like to come down sick if ye don't eat. Ye look mightily peaked, as it is."

To his own surprise, Peter found an odd sense of comfort in the sound of the old woman's cracked voice. It broke through the benumbed wall of his introspection with friendly persistence.

"Peaked!" he muttered, and dragged himself slowly to his feet. "Who wouldn't look peaked?"

"Well, ye have somethin' to look peaked about," agreed Rose Ruby. "Where be they?" she inquired in a husky whisper.

"Ye know well enough where they be!" returned Peter.

She wagged her head and tactfully converted the incipient grin on her lips to a melancholy pucker. With his arms sprawled across the table, Peter's thoughts followed her own up to the little tower room, the door of which had been so unceremoniously closed upon him. The old woman poured the water over the tea leaves with knotty, withered hands that had lost nothing of their deftness. She placed the bread and butter before him, and filled his cup.

"I don't want it," he protested gloomily, but she sugared his tea and stirred it for him.

"Lucky fer her that he married her!" she observed. She waited in suspense for Peter's response; but the fire in his bloodshot eyes was not for her.

"Mebbe ye thought he wouldn't!"

"Them kind generally don't," she said sagely, and with a furtive flash of yellow teeth and eyes.

"But ye notice he did, don't ye?" Peter took a huge gulp of tea, and drew the back of his hand across his mouth. "Ye notice he did marry her, eh?"

"Oh, yes, he married her, all right," she admitted, with a lift of her bony shoulders; "but it ain't like to last long—a marriage like that!"

"Ain't likely to last?" he echoed.

"What's marriage to *him?*" she scoffed. "What does a man like him care fer things like that? That's what I say. Like as not, when he gets her to the city and gets tired of her, he'll throw her out. Oh, I know his kind, I do!"

The old man stared incredulously at her, a new horror supplanting the old.

"Throw her out!" he repeated dazedly. "Throw her out!"

"What does he want of a girl like her fer a wife, when like as not he could 'a' had his pick of city girls?" she demanded hoarsely. "If he'd wanted to marry her, wouldn't he 'a' asked her before—before the other night?"

The horrible significance of that eclipsed all Peter's other fears. Two days of agony had crushed and weakened his reasoning defenses, and left his mind a vulnerable target for the old woman's sentient shafts. She saw the effect she had produced, and went on with added zest:

"He's a city man, an' rich. Why should he come out here lookin' fer a wife? That's what I want to know! She may suit him well enough out here, but how'll she suit him when he gets her to the city, with all his smart friends laughin' at him fer marryin' a hick? That's what *they'll* call her—a hick!"

"A hick!" Peter repeated.

Rose Ruby walked over to the stove, running her tongue around her lips, as if to enjoy the last luscious drop of some rare beverage. She poked the fire ruminatively for a moment before she said, with a resigned sigh:

"Well, he *did* marry her—that's somethin', even if it don't last. She's a missis. That's what I said when my old man quit. 'Well,' I said, 'I'm a missis, anyhow, an' that's a lot more than some folks around here can say!'"

But this final bit of philosophy was lost upon the old man. The word "hick" was still ringing derisively in his ears. Hick, they'd call her, would they? Hick!

The sun, peering redly in at the west windows of the tower, found Richard and the girl facing each other across the litter of half packed bags and trunks. Exhausted, sapped of every vestige of color, the futile evolutions of her emotions had brought the girl to a state of lassitude bordering on coma. It seemed to Richard, looking helplessly across at her, that she had grown thinner in those brief twenty-four hours, that her firm cheeks had sunk, as if from an illness. Her voice was thin and dispassionate as she came back again to the phrase on which their long, dreary discourse had been built.

"I *can't* stay here now, Richard. Surely you can see that!"

"I do. I see how you must feel; but, as I've told you, he spoke in anger. He doesn't understand."

"But that makes it all the worse," she said dully. "He doesn't understand—he hasn't tried. I can't stay in his house, after what he has done and said."

She had said it so often that by now it had become a bleak chant. That morning it had seemed to Richard that the ghastly problem he faced could not be more terrible, more hopelessly impossible of solution. Now, however, he knew the fecundity of that grim damsel, Sorrow, for she had added yet another issue to her grisly brood.

"Dorcas, Dorcas, don't say it again! You can't go!"

"I must."

"But where?"

"Anywhere."

She said it with a wistful fatality that contracted the muscles of his throat and filled his ears with a painful throbbing.

"But I can't let you go like that! My God, I should never sleep again!"

"But you will be going, too."

"How can I leave until I know what you are going to do?"

"I've told you—I'm going away from here."

"And I tell you that you must not! If I could take you—take care of you"—he stopped, paced to the window, and came back again, as he had done a hundred times since the old man's awful ultimatum—"but I can't! Yet I have to go."

"Yes," she agreed. "You have to go."

"But how can I, when you say that you won't stay here—when I shall not know what has become of you? You are a child! If I knew that you were somewhere away from your home—alone, friendless—I couldn't bear it!"

"But you heard my father. How could I stay in his house after that?"

"I tell you he didn't understand!" Richard cried frenziedly. "After I have gone, you could tell him the truth—everything. He would be sure to understand. He would be your greatest comfort, and the fact that you had him would be *my* greatest comfort. I would know that I had not been the cause of driving you away from home."

"I shall never tell him now," she said. "I can never forgive him. He failed me!"

"Ah, Dorcas, my darling—*please!*" He was on his knees before her, and she laid her hand wearily on his hair. "I beg of you not to do this thing—not to leave your home, your father—"

"I must, Richard—I must. You shouldn't have kept me here so long. I told you, when he had gone downstairs, that I wouldn't stay another night. Look, it is almost night now—we should have gone this afternoon."

"We!" he repeated. "We!"

"I thought," she said wanly, "that we could start away together. That would make it look as if we really were going—together. It would save his pride—and mine."

He caught her hands in his.

"And do you think, if we started away together, that I could ever let you go? Do you think I could see you swallowed up in the crowd without calling you back to me? Have you forgotten that I love you?"

"No," she said. "No, Richard—I feel as if we had lived and loved and suffered together for a thousand years. Now I can bear suffering."

"We have suffered together," he said passionately. "It is easier to suffer with some one you love than to suffer alone."

"Yet *you* will suffer alone," she reminded him gently.

"I am different. I'm a man, and I have suffered alone for many years; but you!" He sprang to his feet. "Let *me* tell your father, let me tell him everything, so that he'll turn against me and back to you!"

"Never! Never!" The indomitable decision behind those vehement words was a bequest from old Peter Stayton himself. "Do you think I would demean myself to ask his mercy, when he should ask mine? I would die first!"

Richard knew that there was no appeal from that. He stood at the narrow door of the balcony and watched the dusk creeping over the swamp meadows below. He watched a yellow puppy, from a fisherman's shack down the road, stalk an imaginary bird in the shrubs. He watched, but saw nothing.

When he turned back to Dorcas, still sitting with quiet, folded hands in her lap, still in that patient attitude of waiting, a wild panic took possession of him. The little room seemed suddenly crowded, stuffy—like a cell. If he could get out, it might perhaps be easier to think.

"Dorcas, I'm going out. If I walk a little, perhaps I shall think of something I can do that will help us both."

She rose slowly as he spoke, a vague dread coming into her eyes.

"But there is nothing to think about. You can't change me, Richard. I'm going away from my father. You shouldn't have tried to change me in that!"

"But perhaps I can think of a better way out of this for us."

He reached for his cap.

"Richard"—she lifted her eyes, full of anxiety—"you won't—you aren't going far?"

"Far? No—only promise me you'll not leave this room until I come back."

"If you will give me your promise that you won't speak to father," she urged gently.

"I do promise."

"And you promise that you—you will come back to me?"

He shook his head sadly.

"Do you think I need to promise that, Dorcas?"

Her eyes went involuntarily to the window, beyond it to the fringed flounce of surf along the beach, and back to his.

"*Will* you promise it, Richard?"

He had followed her glance and caught the implication in her voice and manner. He drew her hand against his cheek.

"I do promise; but you needn't have worried, my darling. I'm not going to leave you—like that!"

XIX

From the step beneath the climbing morning glory vines, old Peter watched the sun set and the lurking shadows of dusk sweep over the lawn. Here he had sat, since Rose Ruby left him, to contemplate the unhealthy growth she had sown in his mind—had sat and listened and watched for some sign from the little high room which his thoughts had never once left.

When at last he heard Richard's step in the hall, he jerked himself to his feet and stepped swiftly back into the voluminous foliage of a lilac bush, to wait in hiding, like some sinister bird of prey, for he knew not what.

The fact that Richard emerged from the kitchen door alone, and still in his familiar tweeds, dumfounded the old man. It was not that his pent up fury had crystallized into any definite plan of vengeance. It was not that he had expected any specific move. He had indeed dimly foreseen the hasty departure of both offenders. Now, in the casual appearance of one without the other, in the unchanged tweeds and the apparent nonchalance of the man on whom his venom was focused, he read only a heartless indifference to his sufferings.

It was an involuntary impulse that drew him from the concealing branches of the lilac bush and across the lawn after the tall figure of the younger man. The strange pursuit led down the road to the beach—slowly, at first, for Richard walked with the stiffness of nerve-taut knees and thighs; but his stride quickened as they neared the water. A few faint stars were showing themselves in the deepening gray of the sky, and the squawk of hungry kingfishers came up from the shallows, to mingle discordantly with the hoarse chorus of frogs in the meadows.

Furtive and almost timid at first, the old man's aimless pursuit grew bolder as he noted the resolute gait of the younger man. At the end of the road they turned abruptly up the beach. Here Richard's hands came together behind his back, and he flung up his head, as if in defiance to some unseen foe. Up the beach they went. As the tide was high, the ground they traversed was littered with skiffs and empty lobster crates pulled thriftily back toward the skirting beach grass from the greedy waves.

When they had reached the inlet that curved into the sluice, Richard turned back. Peter, who had known that he must do so, waited, crouching behind an overturned dory, until his prey was a few yards in advance of him before he crept forth to resume the pursuit.

Now Richard's steps lagged. Once he stopped to light a cigarette, and the nonchalance of the gesture brought to the old man's lips a horrible curse that issued forth in a hoarse whisper. Back to the road, back toward the white house—where Richard faltered for a moment before he strode on past it—past the scattered cottages and Rose Ruby's dilapidated shack, on to the junction where the road turned down toward the village. Here Richard whirled about suddenly and came face to face with his pursuer.

Save for the stars, and the sickly light of the single street lamp a few yards up the village road, the night was impenetrably dark. Save for the pallid outlines of his face, Richard could see nothing of the man with whom he had so nearly come into collision; yet he knew at once that it was old Peter Stayton. He knew it by the great, gaunt figure and rakish visored cap; knew it more definitely by the muttered oath that escaped the old man's lips.

"Oh, Mr. Stayton! I beg your pardon—I didn't see you—"

Peter thrust his face forward and spoke thickly.

"But I seen *you!* Ain't I been seein' ye ever since ye left the house fer your little evenin' stroll—alone? What's the matter? Don't Dorcas care about walkin' with ye any more, like she used to? Er is it that you're tired of her already, an' tryin' to sneak off without her? Eh?"

"You're talking nonsense, Mr. Stayton, and you know it. I simply came out for a breath of air—"

"An' where do ye think ye're goin' now, eh? Back to my house agin, after I told ye to git out?"

His voice had risen to a roar. Richard raised a hand fearfully to placate him.

"Yes, yes, I'm going—"

The low, emphatic words, the younger man's palpable desire to avoid further preamble, tore away the last shreds of the old man's restraint.

"Then *go!*" he bellowed. "Get out o' here—an' don't never come back, ye dirty thief! Ye skulkin' coward! Ye sneakin' landlubber!"

It was the final eruption of his volcanic wrath, and in its terrible overflow was his broken parental pride, his white-hot hatred of the man who had stolen his daughter, his memory of Rose Ruby's prophetic words; but not until he saw the sprawling figure at his feet did he realize that he had struck with his heavy fists.

For a moment he stared down, his right arm still raised, his body shaken as if with ague. Then he bent over the formless huddle lying so still, so uncannily still, in the road. Many times he essayed to speak before the words finally came.

"Hey, you! Get up!" Again, when there was no response: "Get up—do you hear me?"

For an awful space a cold fear clutched at Peter's heart. Then he bent over and laid tentative fingers on the limp wrist half buried in the dust. With a grunt of relief he stood up, started off, came back, and dragged the inert body to the side of the road, out of the path of a possible motor or wagon. Then, with a final glance over his shoulder, he hurried off toward the white house, as swiftly as his uncertain steps would carry him.

It was the faint light from the windows of the tower that guided him, but he kept his eyes steadfastly away from those beacons. Once in the security of the little back porch, he sank down on the step, his heart and pulses fluttering wildly, beads of cold sweat running down from under the visored cap and creeping clammily over his cheeks.

Desperately he endeavored to nurse his hot resentment back to life, to justify the memory of those sickening blows; but he could not make the picture of that silent figure lying beside the road seem anything but pathetic. He had struck a man down—he, Peter Stayton. How easily, how silently, his victim had succumbed to those heedless blows! That was the most horrible memory of all—to have a man fall without lifting a hand to defend himself, without a cry of protest. And Peter had kept on striking!

Well, he told himself stoutly, Richard was a coward, a skunk—and a weakling, as well. A weakling—that was it! Why, the city fool hadn't as much fight in him as Dorcas herself! A lubberly swab — that was the name for him. Well, he was down and out for awhile.

Peter mopped his face, but his whole body was bathed in sweat. He remembered the limp wrist he had taken in his fingers. How astonishingly soft it was! It seemed almost fragile. There was agony in the memory, for Peter had struck him down as he might have struck a gross bucko mate on the listing quarter-deck of his old schooner—he who had never struck a member of his crew in all the years he had sailed the seas—he who was known as the most just and tolerant of skippers!

Unable to sit still, he got to his feet, slipped across the dark lawn to the road, and peered anxiously through the darkness toward the village. Only silence greeted him. As he turned back to the house, his gaze leaped involuntarily to the windows of the tower room peering yellowly forth into the night, as if they, too, were searching for something they had lost.

With a groan he flung an arm across his eyes and staggered back to the porch. Shame — hot, scorching shame—enveloped him, and a great sob tore up from his throat.

"Oh, God, ye know I never meant to do it! I never meant to hit him, so help me God!"

France again!

Fashionable Paris had scarcely finished its meager *petit déjeuner*, and the fronts of the smart shops along the Rue de la Paix were submitting to the operations of adroit window dressers, when Henri Deffand entered the establishment of the jeweler whose name was engraved on the cigarette case he carried.

Henri had been chosen for this important mission on the strength of his local reputation as a traveled personage; and if his pompous strut did not cause the flurry along the Parisian boulevards that he had perhaps expected, it was doubtless because there were so few pedestrians abroad at that early hour.

Something of his self-importance had left him when he entered the exclusive little shop and glanced in awe at the dazzling display of precious stones and metals in the cases about him. He waited for some moments before a dapper young clerk, who was polishing the mirrors in the back of the cases with chamois, deigned to notice him, and then it was with a curt word and a sharp glance that were in themselves a reflection on Henri's provincial clothes and sea-burned countenance.

"Well, what will you have, if you please?"

"If *you* please," said Henri politely, "I wish to speak with the proprietor—or the manager, or some one in authority. As you will see by this, it is a matter of great importance."

The clerk accepted the proffered envelope, which bore in the corner the insignia of the *maire* of a Breton village. He looked at it suspiciously for a moment, and disappeared. He came back almost at once, and conducted Henri into a little strong box of a room where a plump little man, who was not quite so dapper as his clerk, was engaged like some modern Midas in counting —or perhaps inspecting—his jewels. The *maire's* note lay open before him, and the jeweler tapped it interrogatively when Henri stood before him.

"This note says that you would see me on a matter of importance."

Henri drew forth the slender, shining silver case, and snapped it apart with the air of a conjurer.

"This little *étui* has your name inside, *monsieur*—you can see that for yourself," he said politely.

The jeweler regarded this indisputable evidence of his workmanship gravely and a bit proudly.

"But yes!" he admitted. "A lady's case, I see, and of exquisite shape and design, as you have probably noticed. And the silver" — he shrugged — "as you see yourself, the silver is of the purest. We use nothing else."

"Then you recognize it?" said Henri triumphantly.

The jeweler's eyes disappeared beneath his upper lids.

"Does a mother recognize her own child?" he demanded indignantly. "Do you perhaps think we turn these exquisite things out by the gross — as the butcher does his sausages, my friend? No! Every one receives the same attention, the same particular consideration, that a babe receives from its own mother. That"—his brows and shoulders lifted in cautious justification of an anticipated complaint—"that is why we command a price that is possibly slightly higher than other shops, dealing in inferior articles of this sort, dare demand. I would guarantee—"

"But, if you please," broke in Henri uneasily, "it is not the price of the case about which I came to speak with you."

"Not the price?" echoed the plump little man. "But naturally not, my friend. If you are any judge of—"

"But I am not, *monsieur*," Henri hastened to admit. "I have only come to ask your assistance in tracing the owner."

"In tracing the owner!" repeated the jeweler.

As he spoke, it was as if he had drawn the blinds up over his expressive round face, just as he would draw the blinds up over his shop windows at night. Like all circumspect Parisians, the little man had a wholesome horror of notoriety, unless it was of a nature to react advantageously upon his business. The laconic note, the solemn Henri, the furtively put questions, all suggested visions of robbery and pawnshops and police investigations. He spoke cautiously from behind those hastily erected blinds.

"But that is not always easy, my friend —to trace the owner of one of these charming baubles. Besides, we sell many—countless numbers of them."

"But the initials," said Henri, pointing them out with a grimy forefinger slightly redolent of sardines. "You see—'D. W. S.' That should make your task an easy one, I should think—and it is of the utmost importance."

"May I ask," ventured the jeweler suavely, "why it is important that you should trace the owner of this case?"

"Ah!" said Henri gravely. "If I said that I wished to trace the owner it is my mistake. It is not exactly that. Unfortunately we do not need to do that." He crossed himself swiftly. "The owner is lying dead at our village."

"Dead!" ejaculated the little man, and took his blinds down at the word. "Ah, that is sad! An accident, I suppose?"

"A motor accident," explained Henri solemnly. "Even now the car is lying on the beach, a wreck. We are trying to trace the woman's connections through this case. It appears to be the only way."

The jeweler looked speculatively at the initials, turned the case over in his hand, and disappeared into an anteroom where the records of his sales mounted ceilingward in dusty tiers. Henri heard him consulting a bookkeeper; and nine or ten minutes later he came back with a white slip of paper in his hand and a blend of triumph and concern in his eyes.

"It was a simple task that you set me," he said seriously. "As it happens, I myself made the sale not six weeks ago. I recall it vividly. She was a charming woman —an American, and rich." He sighed. "So animated, so well spoken! Her French was faultless, I assure you."

"But her name, *monsieur*," pressed Henri politely.

"Was Sells—Mrs. Richard Sells, of New York—though I do not know her address. The case was delivered to the Hotel Lafayette—you know it, perhaps. She had honored us with her account for years—years. And now she is dead. That is sad —very sad."

"Very," agreed Henri, rising.

He moved toward the door, but the jeweler followed him.

"You will go now to the American consul, I presume?"

"Most certainly," admitted Henri, and added meditatively: "If, as you say, she was rich, there will be no difficulty, I suppose, in locating her husband."

"No difficulty whatever," the jeweler assured him, suddenly becoming all affability. "And do not forget the little case, my friend. I expect it will go forward with the —er—body to the husband, who will doubtless wish to preserve it."

Henri took the cigarette case, and endeavored to make his thanks as effusive as the little jeweler's geniality deserved.

"You have been most kind, *monsieur*. I am truly much obliged."

"Pooh, pooh!" protested the jeweler, with elaborate good nature, as he placed his hand confidentially over Henri's. "Still, if I have made your task a trifle easier, perhaps, my good friend, you will do me a slight favor in return—a very slight favor."

"You have but to name it," said Henri politely.

The jeweler's voice dropped to a confidential whisper.

"Then, *monsieur,* if it is not asking too much, since you are going to the American consul, and since you are bound to learn the New York address of Mme. Sells, perhaps you would be so *very* kind as to communicate it to me. You see, *monsieur,* it is a slight matter of business—the case had not yet been paid for."

XX

When Richard opened his eyes, he lay for some time staring dazedly up at the stars through a wavering mist that lent them a kaleidoscopic effect. He raised his arm heavily and drew it across his eyes, only to discover that the mist appeared to be part of the beleaguering pain about his head and temples. His faltering hand came in contact with something damp and soft, which he fingered aimlessly for a moment before he recognized it as grass.

This awoke a vague perplexity in his mind, which gave place almost at once to a creeping lethargy. He fought it off, while the throb in his head became more acute. It was an annoying thing, that pain. It made him sleepy, and yet refused to let him sleep. Well, he would sleep in spite of it!

When he had made this petulant decision, he discovered that there was something the matter with his eyes. They refused to close properly. He was divided, now, into two fractions—the part of him that wanted to sleep, and the part that was an anvil on which a thousand demons forged a thousand red-hot pains.

When the demons finally triumphed over his lethargy, he essayed to lift his head, with a vague idea of going in search of water; but he fell back with an involuntary groan. His second effort was more successful. By slow degrees he raised himself until he had achieved a sitting posture. Then, with a dumb instinct, he drew his hand through the dew-laden grass and laid the palm across his burning eyes.

The demons were pounding out memories now. Peter had struck him. He had fallen with only an upflung arm to protect himself. He had a dumb approval for this. He had *not* struck back—that was something! He had not struck Peter, because he was the girl's father.

Now everything flooded back — Dorcas, the tower room, the wedding. Each memory came individually and gave swift birth to another, until he had it all—but blurred, like a camera plate exposed by mischance.

As he sat there, he was facing the sea and the big white house in the distance. Peering through the darkness, his lurching gaze was caught and held by a double square of yellow light hanging high and steady over the night, like the disembodied eyes of some wistful giant. He stared for a long moment before he knew that he was looking at the windows in the lookout tower, and remembered that she was up there —waiting for him.

It was with one coherent thought riding clear of the muddled confusion in his head that he dragged himself to his feet and stood swaying uncertainly until he should recover some control of his trembling limbs. Then he deliberately turned his face away from the beach and the beckoning lights of the tower, and reeled up the road toward the village.

The effort of walking set all the demons of pain loose again, blinding his eyes, filling his ears with their roar. Half unconscious, he moved by instinct alone, staggering from side to side of the deserted road, lifting his feet high to avoid imaginary obstacles, skirting shadows that took on fancied substantiality, falling to his knees, only to drag himself up again. He was no longer aware of pain, for he was clinging with terrible tenacity to his objective—his desire to reach the village and the house of the kindly little clergyman.

It was a blind impulse that drove him, in his extremity, to the warm-hearted parson. It was an impulse born of that powerful, inbred conviction that the man who has affiliated himself with the house of God has somehow been invested with a special godliness — a wisdom denied to ordinary mortals. A month before Richard would have scorned the idea as childish—primitive; but, robbed now of his surface sophistry, he turned in his necessity to that beneficent tribunal.

The village was dark, save for the sparsely placed lamps along the road, and silent, save for the song of crickets and peepers. He fought his way across the common and down Maple Street to the ivy-laced church and rectory, fumbled up the steps, and pounded heedlessly at the door before he saw and pulled at the bell. Its peal echoed sepulchrally through the silent house, but the hum and buzz in his ears deadened the sound, and he was still jerking it convulsively when the door swung inward, bringing him with it across the sill.

" What's this? What's this? Bless my soul! Wait until I set the lamp down."

The minister's voice was sharp with alarm as he set the lamp he held on a near-by table and bent over the sprawling figure.

" Why, he's been hurt! Bless my soul! My good friend, what is it?"

The fact that there was no recognition in the little man's eyes did not detract one whit from his voluble sympathy. Deftly he closed the door and bounced back to his unconscious caller. Deftly he laid a finger on the limp wrist before he hurried out to the kitchen, scattering sympathetic ejaculations in his wake.

" Poor fellow! Now *who* in the name of common sense—and hurt! Dear me! Bless my heart!"

He was back directly with a pitcher of water and a towel, to bend over the prostrate Richard, to whom had come, for a moment, the blessed oblivion he had been fighting off. Gently the clergyman turned the inert body toward him, and smoothed the clotted hair away with a dampened corner of the towel. The sight of the discolored face, puffed eyes, and swollen lips brought an indignant exclamation to his lips. With the wet towel he washed away the clinging bits of dirt, and squeezed a few drops of water between the parted lips. It was this, and the clergyman's steady flow of words, that brought Richard back to agonizing consciousness.

" Just rest so, my friend. You're quite all right. Take a swallow of this, if you can manage it. It's the good Lord's own liquor. Now try not to move until I slip on some clothes and hop across the way for a doctor. He'll fix—"

"No—for God's sake, no!"

The clergyman paused in his gentle ministrations, and stared incredulously down at those contorted lips through which the desperate cry had broken.

"No doctor! But—why, bless me! It can't be—it is—*is* it Dorcas's young man?"

"Yes, yes—you know—you married—"

"Of course, of course! Richard Sells, to be sure!"

"That's why—no doctor."

"But, my dear boy, you're hurt!"

"Yes—but doctor—mustn't know."

Richard's irritation that the words should come with such painful difficulty brought the weak tears to his eyes; but for the moment the little clergyman's incredulity outweighed his concern.

"The doctor mustn't know! Mustn't know what?"

"That I'm hurt."

He was struggling to raise himself. With Mr. Beckwith's help he sat up, propped against the wall. Then he explained with what seemed to him great clarity.

"That's why I came—to you."

"Yes, yes, and you did quite right, friend—quite right; but I'm not a doctor. More water? That's fine! Can you tell me how it happened?"

With the towel cool and moist against his head, Richard's senses partly cleared. He saw the spare little parson, with a blanket robe flung over his nightgown, from which his bare legs protruded, lean as a sparrow's, and with a pair of list slippers on his feet.

"I'll tell you—why I came—"

"But the accident!"

Richard shook his head petulantly.

"No accident—"

"Then, my dear boy, how—"

"It was her father—of course, he didn't understand."

"You mean Peter Stayton?" ejaculated the parson. "You mean that Peter did this to you?"

Richard nodded heavily.

"He didn't under—"

"But why, man, *why?*"

Involuntarily he had shrunk away from the bruised and battered figure leaning against the wall.

"He was terribly angry. He struck me when I wasn't looking for it. He didn't understand."

"Understand what?" demanded the clergyman harshly. "I never knew Peter Stayton to strike a man down without cause."

There was so little comprehension in Mr. Beckwith's eyes that for a moment it seemed to Richard scarcely worth while to go on. He had so much to explain, too, when he might succumb, instead, to the enveloping languor that offered him merciful oblivion; but the thought of Dorcas kept him conscious.

"That was it—he thought he *had* cause. You married us, but you didn't see the gun."

"Gun!"

"In his pocket — pointing at us. He wouldn't let me talk—wouldn't let me tell him that I—"

A sudden fierce repugnance banished the puzzled distress on the little parson's face. He sprang to his feet and backed away.

"A gun! To make you marry Dorcas—was that it?" His voice was thin and high with emotion. "So that was why you had no license! That was why you were going back to town—and Peter beat you to it!"

"Yes," admitted Richard, immensely relieved that he was understood at last. "Yes, he forced us to marry, you see."

The clergyman's plump hands were clenched, his eyes were shooting fire.

"So that's the sort you are! I was afraid of it when Peter came to me, and yet I thought, when I saw you this morning, that I had misjudged you!" Man and minister were at war within him now. "And Pete hit you!" He flung his arm across his eyes. "God forgive me, I can't blame him. And so you've crawled up here to me—why did you come here?"

"Because," explained Richard, doggedly patient, "I want you to patch things up between Dorcas and her father."

"Between Dorcas and her father! What do you mean by that!"

"She's going to leave him. He's put her out. She mustn't go. I should never sleep again."

Listening with his head cocked on one side, for the words came muffled and almost unintelligible from between the swollen lips, the clergyman's perplexity returned to mingle with his disgust.

"So she's leaving!" he said sharply. "Of course, why shouldn't she? You're not thinking of deserting her—now?"

"Yes—I'm going."

Mr. Beckwith took a step forward. His face was livid.

"And leave her?"

"No—she's going, too, but I can't take her. Her father thinks she's going with me. He thinks it's all right—that she's my wife."

"And so she is!"

Richard shook his head, and spoke almost petulantly.

"But that's what I'm telling you—she isn't. He wouldn't listen when I tried to tell him that I was married."

"Married—before!"

The minister's voice was a thin whisper.

"Ten years," elaborated Richard, cutting his sentences shorter as they came with greater and greater difficulty. "Ten years of hell! Dorcas knows it, but he wouldn't listen. I didn't think he could manage it without a license. I thought I could explain later. I never meant—"

The clergyman turned his back on that grotesquely earnest face, and tried to shut out the mounting horror that assailed him.

"God, this is more than I can bear! And you come to me with it—to me!"

"For help," supplemented Richard stolidly. "You married us—you must keep our secret."

"Secret!" He took a threatening step toward the limp figure. "So that's all you're thinking of now, is it? You want me to hush it up!"

"For her sake," muttered Richard thickly.

"For *her* sake!" echoed the clergyman. "For *her* sake! So you've begun to think of her now, after the damage has been done—after what you've done to that innocent girl!"

The words brought Richard's drooping head up with a jerk.

"Done to her! My God, do *you* think, too—" He lifted a shaking forefinger. "After what her father and *you* have done to her, you mean! *I* love her. Do you think I would harm her? You said you knew real love when you saw it. Well, you see it now! Do you think I would harm her? She's as pure as the day I came here, so help me God!"

And on the balcony of the lookout tower, where her mother and her grandmother had so often sat before her, wooing the dawn that might bring them tidings of absent husbands, Dorcas sat crushed into a little heap, waiting throughout the long night for the man she loved.

When the pale emissary of dawn broke through the east, Henri Deffand was already pulling the courtyard bell of a house in the Champ de Mars section of Paris, laden with his grim message for the American consul, who was indulging in a second cup of *café au lait* over his copy of the *Matin.*

(*To be continued in the June number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

MY PATCHWORK COVERLET

My life's a patchwork coverlet. The blue
Is for all smiling skies I ever knew;

Rose is for all my happy Junes, and green
For all the budding springs I've ever seen.

Purple is for my mourning and my tears;
Black is for deaths and thoughts of lonely biers.

Yellow's for every little stain on truth;
Red is for shame, and white for tender ruth.

Silver's for every kindly word I've said,
And gold for all the love my heart has shed;

And in that last hour when I come to die,
I'll snug it all about me where I lie!

Elizabeth M. Montague

The Piper

THE STORY OF A NEWSPAPER MAN WHO HAD SOME UNORTHODOX IDEAS ABOUT HIS PROFESSION

By Luke Thomas

I FEAR this is the kind of story that young newspaper men should not be allowed to read, but perhaps it has a moral that I don't see.

I had been reporting on the *Messenger* for more than a year when Cary Lee came to New York to look for a job. He and I had been in college together, and on the staff of the student paper; and when there came a vacancy in the city room, I gave Cary a big boost with the chief and A. B. Seer, the city editor, and he landed the berth, with a desk next to mine.

Cary could write—I knew that. On the college sheet he used to do the Catiline editorials denouncing the faculty, and always escaped expulsion. He even went off the reservation into light verse that wasn't bad, and things that he called "vignettes" in the *Literary Monthly*. He was lazy, because of a gift for getting by examinations on sheer bluff and imagination; but you don't have a chance to be lazy on the *Messenger*, so I didn't worry about that.

Of the technicalities of work on a big newspaper he knew nothing. Heads, banks, leads, jumps, boxes, had no message for him. With all the condescension of a sophomore toward a freshman, I hazed him through the first bad days. He made every mistake that a reporter could make, but he never made any of them twice. He had an instinct for ingratiating himself with the proper people which saved him many a bawling out where I had expected to see him flayed alive.

I was helping on the copy desk, one night, when a boy brought me the first story of any importance that Cary had handled. It was something about an attempt to close a theater on the complaint of a reform society, and he had written it in the best style of the ex-editor of the *Campus Clarion*. There were about two sticks of story pasted from the Central News, and the rest of the column set forth Cary's views on vice crusaders and stage morality in general, in his smoothest and roundest rhetoric.

When I had blue-penciled the editorial stuff, and changed his high explosive into blank cartridges of "it is alleged," "those in authority state," and so forth, and had written a lead, there weren't ten consecutive words of Cary's left. I watched his face fall when the paper came up and he viewed the remains of his story; but he never asked why, and he never again committed the sin of intruding his own ideas into the sacred precincts of news—at least, not in that same way.

About a month after Cary joined the staff, he and I took a little apartment together, and I began to renew some of my more intimate impressions of him, which I had forgotten since we left college. He was essentially a grand stand player, with an aversion for any effort that did not flash immediately upon the score board. He relied upon a convincing manner and a real brilliancy to get him by; and it did.

He had done excellently in the army, where his "swank" had won him two promotions. Since then he hadn't been able to hold down any job where sustained application was the quality required.

II

I WAS sitting around the office, one night, enjoying the recess that comes when the forms are locked and the drive for the first edition is over. Most of the staff were out for supper, and the office was quiet, except for the rumble of the linotypes upstairs, or the machine gun staccato of an electric typewriter whose sleep was troubled by a weather report. Eddie Fremont was night editor. We had put the paper to bed, and were sitting on the copy desk, batting 'em out.

" How does your friend Cary Lee like it over here?" he asked.

" Fine, I think. He seems to catch hold all right."

Fremont lit the flaring end of a home-made cigarette, and blew a cloud around the light.

" I was thinking of trying him at rewrite."

" He ought to be good. He's certainly got the imagination and the vocabulary."

" Yeh!" Eddie took another puff, and sent a shower of sparks into his lap. " He's got imagination, all right. I hate to take him off news, but he's been piping lately, and A. B. is getting sore. Doesn't matter, if you can get away with it, only he takes too many chances."

" You mean he's faking stories?"

This is the capital crime in the city room, and I trembled for my protégé.

" No, not really; but if he's on a story, and it doesn't turn out the way he wants it to, he'll write it the way he thinks it ought to be. On that Zodiac Studio fire, for instance, the chief said we had the best story in New York, until he found out that Lee had rung in more fire boats and engine companies than there are in the State, to say nothing of a few extra alarms and a padded list of the dead and injured. That's too much imagination."

" Did you speak to him about it?"

" No, but A. B. did—told him what we were after was facts. The kid said he thought we'd like a newspaper that somebody would want to read. He's got vocabulary, too."

That was Cary's day off, but I found him at the apartment, playing the guitar for a booze party. When they had gone, I explained to him that he swayed on the brink of damnation. Cary loved an argument, and he didn't dodge this one.

" You're on a paper," he said. " Why? Because you think you can write, or because you want to make forty dollars a week running errands?"

" Both," I said. " I want the forty, and I want the experience."

" Experience, my eye!" When Cary got into this mood, he could make you believe you were listening to things you would have known all your life, if only you were as clever as he was. " What do you get out of it? A good headline is one that is fourteen and a half spaces long. A good story, according to Abie Seer, is the Central News plus a little grammar. A good assignment is to sit in some outer office, where you can't smoke, until some bounder comes out and says, ' Sorry, boys, nothing for you to-day.' That's not my idea!"

I remembered my initiation when I was taken on the *Messenger,* and I strove to realize what heresy I was listening to. A year or so before, when I finished my first talk with A. B. Seer, I seemed to see stone tablets whereon was graven the decalogue of the city room—a code of rules whose observance paved the royal road to success; traditions extending through the ages in the greatest of all professions. Some of A. B.'s remarks I now quoted, without acknowledgment, but I merely served the purpose of a middleman in a minstrel show. Cary was launched.

" I came on this paper to write," he continued, " and I'm going to do it, if they fire me for it. I can sit here in this room in a bath robe and write a better story on any assignment than you can by running yourself ragged from Brooklyn to the Bronx. It won't be piping, either. Take that story I wrote on the Zodiac fire. Do you think I had to stick a red card in my hat and stand in a pool of water at two o'clock in the morning to know what a burning studio looks like? I wrote that right here after breakfast, and it was the best story in New York!"

His guard was wide open here, and I came back with Fremont's version of that doubtful triumph. Cary laughed.

" Well, what the hell? It *was* a good story—I don't care if Abie didn't like it. Mrs. Sidding read it, and asked me next day to come over to her department and do Sunday specials; but the chief said no, I was too good. I should worry!"

When he first applied for the job, Cary had told me that he wanted to do newspaper work because it was good training for a writer. He didn't need the money, and if he had merely loafed over it I could have understood; but he didn't loaf. He worked enthusiastically, and with a contempt for every rule of the trade which angered me out of all proportion. Apparently he was still getting by, for they kept him on news, and the telephone bill at the apartment ran up accordingly.

He would get his assignment in the afternoon and then come back to his room, put on a dressing gown, and lie down on the bed by the telephone. From there he would call up the men he was supposed to interview, phone the office, about five o'clock, that he had his story, and then go back at seven and write it.

His afternoon's work took him about five minutes, and already he was writing better stuff than men who had been on the paper for years. He didn't get many big assignments, but they gave him all the " nut " stories—local color in the park, Easter parades, comedies along Rum Row — where his imagination could do no harm.

Even here he skidded. I came home early one night and found him, between a drink and a cigarette, jabbing dreamily at his portable typewriter.

" I'm covering the circus," he explained. " Here, read this!"

I took the pages he handed me. They contained a very touching story, something about a bereaved tigress adopting a brood of cottontail rabbits.

" Bunk!" I told him. " Cary, that never happened."

" Maybe not, but isn't it just what you want to read about a circus? Be a good lad, and write me a number twelve head for it. I never can figure out those things."

This, too, might have got by, but that night a performer at the circus slipped from a flying trapeze and broke his neck, and the *Messenger* was the only morning paper that didn't have a story about it.

III

Here was undoubtedly the cause of Cary's leaving the city room to do special articles for the Sunday magazine section; but he took it as a promotion, called me a wage slave, and condoled with me when I had to go out on rainy days. The situation gradually grew into a noticeable rift between us, because the city staff had always considered itself — and rightly — the heart and soul of the paper. It regarded all specialized departments as mere ornamental adjuncts; and here was this upstart lolling about the apartment while I haunted the subways and the lawyers' offices, and boasting about his " literary progress."

Moreover, he was making progress. The Sunday magazine offered him pastures new, in which his imagination ran wild. He would take a half-column story, which I had proudly dug out on some roving assignment, and spread it over two pages of adjectives at space rates, garnished with Edgar Allan Poe atmosphere and snaky drawings, and then he would tell me what I could do if I only had his literary sense.

A matter-of-fact story of mine about a suit between a landlord and a tenant would start him going. The tax-ridden landlord would become " the heinous harpy ravening the crusts from moribund mouths," and this would be amplified by a bewildered illustrator's conception of a harpy. The delinquent tenant would be " the senescent serf struggling like Sisyphus beneath the rock of his ruinous rent." He would laugh at this himself, and call it " hokum," but he said that showed his versatility.

He found time, besides, to contribute occasionally to fiction magazines, and before long he was making a good deal more money than I was. I had had two raises—each of five dollars—since I had been on the paper. I felt that this success of the dilettante was a slap to honest labor, and the *entente cordiale* in the apartment was not improved.

But about that time the " big story " broke—the sensation for which every one, from copy boy to editor, is always hoping—and I rose to planes beyond the ken of Cary Lee and the Sunday department. A famous moving picture beauty and divorce court devotee was found murdered in her apartment, and every reporter became a detective and every editor a prosecuting attorney.

I was doing a convention banquet, with instructions to phone in my stuff when I was ready, and go home; but as soon as I got the office switchboard I sensed the excitement. When Eddie Fremont answered, he was barking like a staff officer in a counterattack. I took a taxi—dire emergency—to the Norwood Apartments, galloped up three flights to save time, and burst, panting, on the scene of the tragedy.

In a tiny vestibule ten or twelve men were leaning against the wall, smoking, or sitting on folded coats. Some of them were asleep, and all of them had the air of having been there for hours and expecting to stay all night. At the door to the apartment a patrolman was yawning, glad to be in out of the cold.

Helty, of the Central News, was pitching pennies in a corner. He turned at the sound of my Marathon finish.

" Take it easy, young fellow! You won't miss anything."

I looked around at the men from the various papers, most of whom I knew, and grinned a little sheepishly at my excitement. Helty took me over to the head of the stairs.

" Sit down and rest your dogs. I'll give you the synopsis of previous chapters."

" Who's in there now?" I asked.

" Inspector McLoughlin's in there, and the maid who found her, and the elevator boy. Captain Casey, of the homicide squad, just arrived, and they brought in two people, a man and a woman, who were here this afternoon. We won't get anything for a long time."

On the margins of an evening paper I noted the facts that Helty had gathered. Some of them I knew. Myra Milden was well represented in the " morgue " of every newspaper office, in cuts and clippings relating her adventures in breach of promise suits, matrimony, divorce, suicides, vaudeville, later in pictures, and more recently in some unsavory scrapes involving drug raids, blackmail, and the hinted suppression of prominent names.

From the detectives first summoned by the maid, Helty had learned that Miss Milden had been on a late party the night before, returning about three in the morning with a persistent admirer known in the apartment as Corliss. During the day she had stayed in bed, and had seen no one, except the two visitors now being questioned by the inspector, and Corliss, who arrived for dinner.

The maid testified that Miss Milden had dismissed her about eight o'clock, although Corliss had not yet left. Returning an hour later, she found the actress unconscious upon the *chaise longue*, the room in disorder, and Corliss gone.

The medical examiner had said that death was due to strangulation, and the whole case seemed of the primer variety. There remained only a little work for the finger-print men, the construction of a motive—and to find Corliss.

" That's the whole works," said Helty. " The inspector won't be out till he's all through with those birds, and then he won't say anything. There's no use your sticking around. You can't use anything to-night. I'll have all the dirt on the Central News for you to-morrow, so you might as well beat it."

But this was contrary to Seer's rule No. 6, " Never leave a rat hole," and I stuck it out.

When the inspector finally appeared in the doorway, and the pack woke up and jumped on him, he added nothing to what Helty had told me, except to say that he was not holding any one. The slaves of the news went off sleepily to telephone booths and to bed.

IV

When I got home, Cary was playing chess with a night owl friend of his. They were down to a rook and two pawns each, and far beyond anything as trivial as a murder story. Cary finally queened a pawn at the price of his rook, and sat back with that fatuous air of a superman which is worn only by winners of chess games.

" Well, what has the famous nose for news smelled out to-night? Murder, you say, or is it only ' alleged '?"

I told him the story, planning how it should sound when I came to write it.

Cary interrupted.

" I'll finish it for you. ' In a private interview with the criminal expert of the *Messenger*, Inspector McLoughlin said—' "

" Hold on! You can't quote him."

" I'm sorry—I forgot this is only *news*. ' Those in charge of the investigation stated that the only point which remained to be cleared up was whether any one had gained access to the ill-omened '—oh, no adjectives—' to Miss Milden's apartment after What's-His-Name's departure. It was announced that no one at present was being detained by the police, but suspicion focused on the person of a well known society leader and art patron ' — certainly, they're always art patrons—' whom they expected to have in custody within twenty-four hours. At the office of the district attorney it was—' "

I was laughing in spite of myself.

" You're out of bounds! McLoughlin didn't say anything about a suspect."

" That's what he *would* have said. Why not let the paper get the credit for it?"

" You might as well pass a bum check as write stuff like that!"

Cary was setting up the chessmen.

" The check's good enough. It's just dated ahead."

" You'd really write stuff like that about the district attorney? He's in bed, and doesn't know it happened."

"But he'll be up in the morning, before you are, and then I suppose you'll go down to the Criminal Courts Building and sit on a table for four hours until he does say it."

"Say what?"

"What he always says." Cary moved a pawn. "I'll try that bishop's gambit again," he said, and Myra Milden and I were forgotten.

The next day I did go down to the Criminal Courts Building, and I did sit on a table for four hours, and so did all the men I had seen the night before, to say nothing of half a dozen photographers and flashlight men. The police had brought in some friends of the actress's to be questioned, but they were all released, and when we finally cornered the district attorney, he told us exactly nothing. Corliss was the man they wanted, but that wasn't his name, and the description furnished by the maid and the hall boy might have fitted any one who wore a white collar.

"Who is Corliss?" became the mystery sensation of New York.

Unfortunately, guesses, however shrewd, could not be printed, and a mystery can be written up only once.

Then the terriers of the Detective Bureau took the ground, but there was nothing to show which way the chase led. The flaring headlines of the Milden murder smoldered to a dull ember on the eighth page, and finally went out altogether, when a child of poor parents was kidnaped and the paper took two columns to offer a thousand-dollar reward.

I was sent to Boston, to interview a man whose initials were on a cigarette case found among the dead girl's things. Cary was jubilant when I returned empty-handed.

"'Star Reporter Turns Murder Sleuth,'" he quoted. "Only they won't let you say 'sleuth,' will they? Well, any word of six spaces will do. What happened to your nose for news?"

"How could I know that he wasn't in Boston?"

"Because yesterday he made the twelfth hole in one at Pinehurst. I read that while I was having breakfast in bed. I shot that course one time in—"

"I know," I said. Cary was getting on my nerves. "Twice."

"Twice what?" he asked.

"Twice what you're going to say. Besides, I haven't time to read golf scores, or have breakfast in bed."

"But you have time to spend ten hours on a train to ask a man who isn't there something he doesn't know!"

"You can't tell till you ask him."

"Certainly you can. The night you came in here and said the Milden woman had been murdered, that fellow was at Madison Square Garden. He offered two prizes for sprints in the six-day race. I'd just been there."

I walked into the back room, but Cary followed.

"Don't get sore," he said. "I'm not a reporter any more, so I don't give a damn. It's just a theory."

"What is?" I asked.

"I've been reading the memoirs of this fellow Leighton, that we're running in the Sunday section. He started on a paper, and he tells why you never meet the good reporters around town."

"They're having breakfast in bed," I suggested.

"Maybe; but they write the big stories, while nuts like you go running wild looking for somebody to tell them!"

I explained to him again the difference between a dependable reporter and a lively imagination.

"But can't you see they go together? A reporter puts down what he thinks he sees, or the lies somebody tells him. A writer knows why his characters move and what they're thinking about. Why not combine the two?"

In my opinion this "theory" of Cary's had got him fired from the city staff, but I couldn't rub that in, and he wouldn't have seen it, anyhow, so I let it go.

V

For me the fascination of doing news is that it is always new. When I walked into Seer's office in the afternoon, and he scowled over the list of assignments, the suspense held every possibility from a reconnaissance in Chinatown to a wedding reception.

On this day I was handed a clipping relating the death of a prominent Long Island sportsman named Branchard, with instructions to go down there and get the material for his obituary. I had often heard of him as an amateur of horses, money, airplanes, women, racing cars, and polo, and I was figuring how much space his fatal accident would be worth.

He had left his house late the night before to get a car from the garage, and had returned shortly to put on some rough clothes, saying that the chauffeur was away, the fan belt on the roadster was broken, and he would have to repair it. He was discovered, next morning, dead on the garage floor, the tools lying where he had dropped them, and the motor of the car still running. The doctor said that his death was caused by carbon monoxide poisoning from the gas of the exhaust.

In the story I wrote that night I expressed the surprise which every one felt that so experienced a man as Branchard had been fool enough to run a motor in a small garage with the doors closed, and I mentioned the great number of similar accidents that had occurred.

I didn't see Cary to talk to until the following evening, just before dinner. He was asleep on the sofa with a copy of the *Messenger* in his lap, and he blinked his eyes when I slammed the door.

" I called you at the office," he yawned. " They said you'd been out all day."

I had been covering a trial in White Plains, and told him so.

" What happened?" he asked. " I never read newspapers since I've seen how they're written."

I shuddered, thinking how Seer always insisted that every reporter should know every item of news in the morning edition before he came on duty.

" I suppose that's what put you to sleep," I said, pointing to the one in his lap.

" Oh, that! I was reading your story on Branchard. Mrs. Sidding wants me to do a Sunday splash about it, and I thought I'd get some dope from you. You seem to have covered everything in your usual conscientious style."

" Thank you!"

" There's just one ' out ' in this."

" Yes?" I asked as gently as I could.

" About its being strange for Branchard to pull a bone like that."

" Why, any damn fool knows that the exhaust of an automobile—"

He interrupted.

" Exactly! Do you remember that one night you and I and Eddie Fremont were talking about the ways people chose to kill themselves? Eddie said he'd take a Colt forty-five. You said you'd close the windows and turn on the gas. Well, next to a few marked ' made in Germany,' here's the deadliest gas in the world—carbon monoxide. If a bird goes to bed with the tube in his mouth, people say, ' Cowardly suicide.' If he chooses to inhale the muffler exhaust, they say, ' Too bad! He should have known better.' What could be sweeter?"

" You going to say that in your nut Sunday stuff?"

Cary shook his head.

" I'm not going to say anything. Not my line. I'm a writer. I'm not a reporter. This is *news*."

" Yes, the kind of news *you* used to write—the kind that would cost the paper half a million in libel suits, and cost me my job!"

Cary took some papers from the desk.

" If you need a second-day story on Branchard, I'll let you use this," he said, handing them to me. " There isn't an adjective in it."

I knew what to expect when Cary cut loose, but this was worse than ever:

> The suicide of Eugene Branchard supplied a last act to the Myra Milden melodrama, which no expert of the police department was able to foresee.
>
> Corliss, the man of mystery, has at last been taken—taken only to escape again in the spirit of Gene Branchard, who died by his own hand at his Long Island home.

I threw the stuff on the table and stared at Cary in real alarm.

" You're not safe to be left at large!" I told him. " When you're fired from the paper, they'll give you a ticket to the cuckoo nest. This is worse than piping. This is a statutory crime!"

He carefully gathered up the scattered sheets and gave them to me again.

" Better finish reading it," he said; " because, if you don't use it, I will, but I'll have to rewrite it."

I went on with the atrocity:

> Persons not connected with the investigation, who doubted the manner of Branchard's death, induced persons who had known Corliss to view the body of the dead man. These persons were unanimous in their identification of Myra Milden's alleged murderer.

Cary's mind had been following the text as I read, and he was grinning when I looked up.

" Don't scold me any more," he said; " because, if that isn't news, I never saw any. Only you'll have to write a head for it. I never can figure out those things."

" Good God, man!" I said. " If this is straight, we'll write the head with a paintbrush; but—but—but how—"

"It's straight, and it ought to make a nice little exclusive story for you. Isn't that what you call 'em? Only you'll have to hurry."

"But these 'persons' you've got in here —who ever 'doubted the manner of—' "

"I did," said Cary, "and I gave the maid and the bell hop five dollars apiece to go down to Bayshore and look at this fellow Branchard. He was Corliss all right, but I don't know how long they'll keep quiet about it; so if you want your exclusive little story—"

I had my hat and coat on already.

"What made you suspect *anything?*" I asked. "You didn't go down there!"

"No; and you did. You said that Branchard went to the garage to fix the fan belt on his R. L. S. roadster. Now an R. L. S. hasn't got a fan belt. I was reading your story in bed this morning—"

But I didn't wait for Cary's theory.

A Flame-Colored Evening Gown

A WOMAN EXPERIMENTS WITH THE THEORY THAT THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM OF LIFE IS NEVER TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING

By M. L. Storrs

THIRLING leaned from the window for a glimpse into the thronged, hurrying street below. New York again, after all the mud and cannon roar and suffering and death!

New York, and yet a stranger city, as unreal and dreamlike as France itself was fast becoming to her. She could clutch but one reality now—those two weeks when she had dared to laugh in all war's chaos—two prescient weeks, and Malcolm's face vibrant with that stupendous love of life which so radiated from him, Malcolm's voice plumbing the very core of her with its tender nuances of tone.

She turned back into the room, discarded her dressing gown, and put on her uniform. Oh, she must not think of him! That way lay madness. She must forget.

No—that was impossible. If she could find peace in her thought of him—could learn to enshrine him as a radiant memory, mellowing life rather than embittering it—if she could do that! What a difficult task, when the future stretched before her like a procession of gray days waiting to be filled!

And filled they must be—filled to the full, as those months in France had been.

"A work that will absorb you, my dear!"

That had been the advice of Mrs. Briggs, Thirling's gray-haired ship companion, of whom the girl had made a partial confidant. Such a lovely woman! She, too, had been an army nurse, and her last few months had been spent in that great Belgian hospital near the spot where Malcolm—

Always Malcolm—always that reiterated agony of loss!

Thirling put on her hat and hurried from the hotel. She would breakfast at a familiar tea room. Perhaps that would make her feel more at home.

How wide the avenue was! And she had forgotten that the Public Library was so massive. Many times she and Malcolm had planned their home-coming. They had planned it beneath a ruined wall over which roses, not yet killed by gas fumes and the rain of shells, clambered determinedly. They would pretend that they were home. She could choose the play they would see, and describe the gown she meant to wear. Foolish child's play!

Was the tea room on Thirty-Seventh Street? It was so difficult to remember—to remember anything!

That man ahead of her — such broad, straight shoulders! Malcolm had been about that height, and might have looked so in civilian clothes. Even the set of the head—

Why, her heart was pounding wildly! What a fool she was! A dozen times in the last month some passing stranger had reminded her of him, had made her heart cry out anew with that hope at first so strong—the hope that he was not really gone. The War Department made so many mistakes!

What idiocy to delude herself thus! If he were alive, would he not come to her?

The man before her swung along with easy, athletic grace, with a debonair freedom in his carriage. So Malcolm had walked. Oh, it might be he! It might indeed!

Cross-town traffic had forced him to stop now. She was so close to him that she could have touched the fine wool of his coat. She would crowd up beside him, look into his face, and banish this childish notion.

She was at his shoulder. As if aware of her scrutiny, he turned toward her.

His name escaped her once:

" Malcolm!"

She cried it out in a surge of thanksgiving and joy, tempered by the fear that this was only an illusion sent to torture her. His face wavered before her. Her head buzzed, and she wondered if she were about to faint. Then his features came clear again with a dreadful clarity, as if one were to look with X-ray mercilessness through a loved one, to see, beneath the smiling surface, a dread skeleton of gross desire and wanton purpose.

Love, a transport of happiness at seeing her once more—did she see that? No—embarrassment, eagerness to escape from an unexpected and awkward situation!

She stood dumbly looking at him, unable to believe that this last blow could be possible, seeking desperately for some explanation that would bring back her faith and her dreams.

He began to talk hurriedly, as if he feared reproaches and wanted to forestall them. Through a roaring in her ears his words came sketchily to her. He said something about a mistake in identification tags, about having been seriously wounded, about months of unconsciousness in a Belgian hospital. Then followed excuses. He had not known exactly where she was. If he had—well, one sentence came clearly to her and repeated itself:

" I intended to look you up."

Malcolm looking *her* up!

" Where are you staying?" he asked finally.

" It doesn't matter!" she answered, the words croaking from a dry throat.

" But I want to come and see you."

" No! It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter!"

She could find nothing else to say. She turned and fled from him the way she had come. She did not look behind her. She fairly ran on and on, for blocks and blocks up Fifth Avenue. It was as if she hoped to escape that dreadful memory; but his words followed and tortured her:

" I intended to look you up."

She recalled, too, the name of the hospital where he had been. Just recently some one else had mentioned that hospital. Why, it was the gentle, gray-haired woman on the steamer—Mrs. Briggs! She must have been there when Malcolm was there. She might have known him.

In her purse Thirling found the woman's card, with the address of an apartment house on Sixty-Fifth Street. The girl began to walk more slowly, and took cognizance of her surroundings. She was approaching Sixtieth Street. Strange that she had walked so far! Only five blocks more!

As if the woman was waiting for her, she began to hurry.

II

Mrs. Briggs herself opened the door. Thirling had a blank moment of wondering just why she had come, and what she would say. Then she found herself talking.

She plunged at once to the object of her visit. She kept repeating his name:

" Malcolm Royer—Malcolm Royer—oh, you must remember! You must!"

It seemed that the world hung upon Mrs. Briggs remembering.

" My dear!" The woman's voice was pitying. " That isn't the man you thought dead?"

" Yes, yes! I just met him on the avenue. You do remember, don't you?"

" He was not in my ward."

"But you heard of him? Tell me! It can make no difference now. Was it some one there—some one he cared for?"

"I—I did hear gossip—about a nurse. It didn't last, you know—just transitory. His convalescence was long, and—"

"And then, after that?"

"A—a young French girl who ran errands about the hospital."

"Oh-h-h!"

"He is like that, my dear! Handsome and charming—but he only touches. I am afraid he would never hold."

"Only touches!" Thirling repeated. "Yes, yes—that must be it. I should have been clever enough to see!"

"You'll forget him now," Mrs. Briggs said, as Thirling was leaving.

"I have forgotten him already," replied the girl.

Back in her room at the hotel, Thirling sat before the desk, clasping her hands upon a rose-colored blotter. What irony! She had mourned him as dead, had prayed that death might take her, too; and meanwhile he had amused himself with a nurse, had discarded her for a French serving girl, had left her in turn for—God knew whom!

Suddenly Thirling found herself laughing—a laugh of strange, cracked mirth, her first in many months. She could not stop her laughter, and presently it turned to sobs—great breath-taking convulsions of her entire body. Finally, exhausted, she crept to the bed and dropped into heavy slumber.

Thirling's first waking thought was that she had gone to sleep laughing. Then it all swept over her with a stinging pain. He was not dead. She could not even cherish the memory of those beautiful two weeks. She must pluck them out and cast them from her, like some unclean thing.

She rose and moved at random about the room. A nurse! A French serving girl! And he had meant to look her up! She could have laughed again, but she feared the abandon of the morning. Finally she realized that it was dusk, and that she had not eaten that day. As she combed her hair, she shrank from the bright, half mad eyes of the woman in the mirror.

It was a late dinner hour when Thirling descended, and she found the hotel dining room almost deserted. Near her, however, was a party of six unchaperoned young people. They were very merry. From fragments of their conversation she gathered that before dining they had gone to the apartment of one "Hal," who had made cocktails.

Thirling was fascinated by one of the girls, who wore a flame-colored evening gown, from which her white arms and neck rose gloriously. She was so care-free, this young creature, so irrepressible!

Watching, Thirling envied the girl. Oh, to steep herself in such abandon! To laugh, laugh, laugh! Never to be serious about anything! Why, it was a solution for the very problem of life. If only she, Thirling, could do that—could forget in laughter the horrible irony of Malcolm and France!

The next day a white-faced woman in a nurse's uniform entered a Fifth Avenue shop.

"I want clothes—an entire wardrobe," she said. "I think we will begin with a flame-colored evening gown."

III

Overtaken by a sudden weariness, Thirling leaned against the rough wall behind her. The moonlight poured in upon the wide veranda of the clubhouse, putting to shame the electric globes in the ceiling. The orchestra, protesting union hours, had gone home at two o'clock; but Chet was substituting on the piano, and his jazz was *par excellence.*

Molly Gaines had leaped upon the broad rail, and was dancing there like an elfin sprite, her royal blue dress falling about her like wispy flower petals. As she danced, she sang absurd impromptu words to Chet's music:

"A kiss! A kiss! Now do not miss!
Catch me as I jump, and get a kiss!"

What a cunning thing Molly was! But somehow, with such a peach of a husband—

Thirling caught herself up sharply with—

"You prudish little idiot! Tom Gaines is a hopeless puritan! And so," she added vindictively, "is Laurence Boardman."

Laurence! He seemed to stand for the moment before her, looking at her with steady, disconcerting eyes. She could have stamped her feet at the very image.

"A kiss! A kiss! Now do not miss!
Catch me as I jump, and get a kiss!"

Molly pretended to be on the verge of jumping, and a wave of black-clad masculinity surged toward the rail; but she drew back, and danced on tantalizingly. A bit shamefaced, Roger turned back to Thirling, "Now if that were you, it might be worth while!"

His cheek approached hers. She drew back with a careless—

"Behave yourself, old topper!"

But something within her said:

"Go away! Your eyes are slightly popped, and your mouth has a horrid loose look. Go away!"

"A kiss! A kiss! Here I come, boys!"

The sprite was eclipsed by black coats and white shirt fronts. Staccato shrieks punctuated the payment of the bargain. It was all right, of course. Molly was such a cunning thing!

Roger's voice, low yet arresting, cut short Thirling's disturbed thoughts:

"Good Lord! There's Tom!"

A slender man of medium height strode out upon the veranda. Seeing Thirling, he came directly to her.

"Where's Molly?" he demanded.

"Why—why—somewhere about. I—"

The wave of masculinity parted, revealing the elfin sprite, disheveled, but not one whit less radiant. Molly put one hand on her hip and cried:

"Bargain day at Wanamaker's!"

Then she saw her husband. The hand dropped, and she walked toward him.

"I came by for you," said Tom.

"But Thirl and Roger were going to take me home."

"I came by for you."

She shrugged and followed him. From the door she wafted a goodnight kiss to the merrymakers.

There was a moment's silence after that. Then Chet began to gather up his music, and with one accord the guests set out for cloaks and motors.

Roger and Thirling reached the porte cochère to find an automobile, its engine throbbing, drawn up there. Tom was helping Molly into the tonneau. At the wheel sat a bare-headed young man with steady gray eyes. Laurence! She might have known he would be with Tom!

Thirling had a sudden distaste for—she knew not what—life, perhaps. She expressed her irritation in a cynical wave of the hand and a gay—

"Hello, Bobo!"

She knew he hated that nickname she had persisted in bestowing upon him.

"Hello, Thirling," he answered.

Roger stumbled a bit as they went down the steps. Behind them Chet was half carrying the girl he had brought; and Laurence had seen. Thirling scourged herself for that feeling of shame.

"Oh, will you always be a prude?" she demanded. "What do you care for his eyes? Why can't you snap your fingers with just the right abandon in the faces of such joy killers as Laurence and Tom?"

"No use going home," Roger said, when they were out upon the road. "Why not take a run up the Skyline?"

She shrugged acquiescence, and he turned the car toward the great summer home built by a California man who had constructed a scenic drive leading up to it.

When Roger would have put his arm about Thirling, she laid it back upon the wheel.

"'Tention to driving, old boy!" she said, in the ironic drawl which was one of the last year's acquisitions. "Petting on the Skyline strictly prohibited!"

He grumbled at her aloofness. With the first long grade at an end, he began to tear wildly around the curves, glancing sidewise to see if she was frightened.

"Better use discretion, precious," she said presently. "Chet calls this one ahead Hell's Curve."

He laughed.

"How many kisses if I slow on Hell's Curve?"

"Not my bargain day, thanks!"

"Then I'll take it at sixty."

A tremor of fear ran over her.

"Oh, well—"

"How many?"

"One."

"Tightwad!"

Nevertheless, he abated their pace, and took the first part of the treacherous double curve at a conservative speed. As they swung around the second, Thirling gave a cry of fear, and Roger's brakes ground down. They came to a stop so abrupt that the girl was thrown against the front of the car as it struck the upturned roots of a large tree fallen across the road.

"Close shave!" Roger's voice was somewhat uncertain as he stepped down into the road.

"If you hadn't slowed—" whispered Thirling.

"Been all up with us!" He walked to the tree, shaking his head at the mud-caked roots. "'Twould have thrown us off the road like that!"

Thirling shivered as she glanced down

the steep slope, barren save for a clump of spruce some distance below them.

" Must have been that thunder shower this afternoon," Roger said.

Completely sobered, he again took his place beside her. On the long downward slopes of the Skyline they scarcely spoke. Thirling was still shaken by her fright, and longed for the quiet of her room at the hotel. Roger seemed even to have forgotten the promised kiss.

They slipped past the high iron gates of country homes, and Thirling gave a sigh of relief when the little town of Radcliffe appeared before them. They would soon be at the hotel now.

There was a light at the station—the only one in all that slumbering village. As they approached, a man appeared on the edge of the platform, leaped down into the road, and signaled them to stop. Roger brought the car to a halt.

" Happen to be going to the Lodge?" inquired the stranger.

His voice was singularly delightful, fraught with interesting nuances of tone. Thirling shrank back into the car. Malcolm! Oh, she had prayed that she might never see him again! If he would only fail to recognize her!

But he was coming toward them.

" You see, I—why, Thirl, as I live! I wondered what had become of you!"

She must answer, must show him how little he mattered now. She must let him know that she had learned to laugh.

" You again, Mal?" she asked. " Queer place to meet you! This is Mr. Lenham—Malcolm Royer, Roger. Old suitor of mine—wartime romance, big guns, patriotism, hysteria—you understand. We can take him on, of course."

Oh, she carried it off well! Her other self seemed to sit back in approbation of this new one, which rose so splendidly to the situation. As they started on again, Malcolm in the tonneau, she inquired carelessly over her shoulder:

" How did you come here at this time of night?"

" Boston Flyer."

" But it doesn't stop at Radcliffe."

" So I discovered. I started for Boston, but decided to drop off here for golf. I sneaked through to the observation car, pulled the bell rope, and then, when the train stopped, I quietly slipped off the back platform."

Malcolm laughed low and exultantly. Thirling had heard him laugh so in France when he told her of college escapades, or how, in order to buy a certain kind of tobacco, he had bluffed through the lines, the night before, on his motor cycle.

" I hope the Lodge isn't out of your way?" he inquired perfunctorily.

" Not at all," Roger answered. " I'm taking Thirl to the hotel, and that's just beyond."

" Up here long, Thirl?"

" All summer. I like it. Good snappy crowd!"

Thirling's body was aflood with an excitement which swept over her in alternate surges of heat and cold. Her voice was husky. The blood beat in her throat. Still, the training of the last year stood by her in this crisis. She was able to talk to Malcolm over her shoulder, able to talk lightly, lazily, cynically, able to show him that she had learned to laugh and laugh.

" May I give you a ring, Thirl?" Malcolm asked, when he left them at the Lodge.

" If you like," she answered indifferently.

IV

As they drove off down the road, a great reaction made every muscle in Thirling's body limp and exhausted. She wanted to cry, to sob out her exhaustion. It seemed that she could not wait for the peaceful security of her room at the hotel. She began to tell herself childishly, over and over again, that they would be there in less than half an hour.

Then the car slowed. The engine gave an expiring succession of ineffectual pops, and they found themselves stalled beside the road.

Roger swore under his breath as he vainly endeavored to get under way again. Thirling dared not speak for the sobs of disappointment foolishly crowding her throat. Roger muttered something about " that darned garage," and climbed out of the car. He was just lifting the hood when they heard behind them a sound like the rushing of wind.

Roger paused to look expectantly up the road. A motor swept around the curve, slowed as it approached, then came to a full stop beside them.

" Trouble?" inquired Laurence Boardman, leaning out into the moonlight. " Can I help?"

Thirling's momentary relief at the prospect of aid turned to added irritation and disappointment. She could have put her head on the leather seat beside her and wept for very weariness. Oh, she did not want Laurence's help!

Roger, not consulting her, was arranging matters.

"You might take Thirl on to the hotel," he suggested. "Then you can phone the garage to have me towed in."

And, scarcely waiting for Laurence's assent, he opened the door of his car and stood waiting to help Thirling out. She swallowed her sobs, and managed a smile in answer to his contrite—

"I'm sorry, Thirl!"

Yet she was resentful as she settled into the seat beside Laurence Boardman. She had a desire to blame him for all the night's difficulties. She hoped he would speed dreadfully and reach the hotel in the shortest time possible. She didn't want to talk to him—not a word.

He applied himself to the wheel. She readjusted her cloak and lightly patted her hair. At the end of perhaps three minutes, he said abruptly:

"You're tired."

"No—not very." She forced herself to her light, careless manner. "The dance was a knockout. You should have been there!"

"I fished all day, then went over to chin with Tom, and just naturally fell asleep in the hammock. I didn't awake until one o'clock."

She made no answer to this. After an interval he said:

"You puzzle me."

"How lovely! To be puzzling is to be interesting, isn't it?"

"Perhaps."

Curiosity forced her to ask:

"How do I puzzle you?"

"You seem to be—well, playing a part. I can see you stand back and look at yourself and say, 'That's pretty well done, now!'"

She had a moment of panic. So this was the meaning of his disconcerting eyes! They had indeed looked through and through her. She waited to regain her balance, then drawled:

"Intriguing idea! Reminds me of a mystery play—recovering the lost jewels, or getting a stolen inheritance, or something like that. Just why do you think I'm indulging in these private theatricals? And how do you picture me in what you might call my true character?"

"I don't know. I only know that you strike me as a girl who just at present hasn't the courage to be herself."

"We were talking about that up at the club the other day—about being yourself, unrepressed, and all that. We rather flattered ourselves that we did it pretty successfully."

"Perhaps—some of you."

"Molly Gaines, for instance?"

"Yes—Molly."

"To be yourself is mainly following your impulses, isn't it?"

"If the impulses come from within."

"Then Molly's come from within, mine from without?"

"So I suspect."

They had stopped before the hotel. Laurence helped her out and walked with her to the veranda. There he turned suddenly and caught both her hands.

"I wish I knew if I am right!" he cried. "Please understand that I am not a prude. I don't pal a lot with that Country Club crowd, because I'm a quiet duffer, and I'd only be pretending to like the things they do. I'm not the best company in the world, and I don't get sizzled gracefully. I admire Molly Gaines. She is herself, and she can't change. That she married Tom is his tragedy, and hers. Having seen them, I would never dare to love a girl of Molly's type; but, God help me, I'm perilously near to loving you!"

V

It was long before Thirling slept that night. Pictures, diverse, frightening, overwhelmed her—France and the roar of guns, and Malcolm playing upon her heartstrings with his delightful nuances of tone; Roger, their car nosing a great tree uprooted across the road; Laurence Boardman saying:

"But, God help me, I'm perilously near to loving you!"

Laurence had been sincere—yes, utterly so. Malcolm had been sincere, too—for the time; but Malcolm only touched, while Laurence would hold.

What nonsense was she thinking? Surely, when she had only just learned how to laugh, she was not going to turn serious again! So, between Malcolm and Laurence, Laurence and Malcolm, she finally fell asleep.

It was noon when she awoke. She felt very languid, and had a breakfast-lunch served in her room. At two o'clock the telephone brought to her ears that charming, familiar voice.

" Just met Molly Fairweather on the links," Malcolm said. " She's married now. I've forgotten the name. I took her to a prom once. She says she knows you."

Thirling admitted that this was true, and Malcolm went on:

" I suggested a little dinner. There's an Italian inn about here somewhere—Spinetti's, I think the name is. Thought maybe you'd like to come along. How about it?"

Molly with Malcolm, and herself as chaperon, Thirling told herself bitterly! She choked back the hysterical laughter rising in her throat, and explained that she had another engagement. Malcolm suggested that she should break it. She refused. After much colloquy the connection was broken.

Thirling began to dress then, but she was slow about it, fumbling, making vague, unnecessary movements. Malcolm and Molly—with one of Malcolm's discarded loves to lend propriety! There was irony for you!

Oh, the world was irony—a queer, mad place. Laurence wanted her to be herself. That was the queerest and maddest of all, for who was herself? Who, who? She seemed to have manifold identities.

There was the girl of four years ago, just graduated from college—a girl who had not yet acquired a taste for cocktails, who seldom took more than two glasses of wine, and who had never danced all night. Was that herself? Or was it the girl of those first months in France—thin, always tired, uniformed, selfless? Or the radiant creature of those weeks after she met Malcolm, performing hard tasks mechanically, her days one long dream of a love-filled future?

Ah, that girl had been happy, happy! But the one who followed—that despairing person ready even to take her own life—no, surely that was not herself!

And so she came to the Thirling of to-day, with wispy evening gowns and a platinum cigarette case, who carried a flask in her vanity box and laughed, laughed. She was satisfied by none of these selves. She wanted to cast them all out, to forget, to find a new being who dared to think, who dared sometimes to stop laughing, who wasn't afraid of being hurt.

It was five o'clock when Thirling went downstairs. She took a walk in the trees behind the hotel, and returned early for dinner, hoping to finish before any of her friends came in. She could not laugh to-night. For a year she had put thought from her, but she could do so no longer. She must face it out, must somehow make her way out of this chaos which was overwhelming her.

Laurence Boardman was already dining. She was surprised to see him there, for his fishing ordinarily kept him out until dark. She hoped he had not seen her, but when she emerged from the dining room it was to find him waiting for her.

He wondered if she would like to take a ride. The day had been so warm. He was very gentle and—yes, understanding. His eyes were no longer disconcerting, but dropped before hers like an abashed boy. She could not feel resentment against him to-night. Yes—she would go.

Out on the road, a silence lay between them. He did not appear to expect her to talk; and she found that last night had somehow made her old-time chatter impossible. They passed Spinetti's, ablaze with light amid its surrounding trees, and Thirling's heart was cut by that old sharp pain of loss. Malcolm was in there. He would look very handsome and debonair, while Molly was always—Molly.

Surely Thirling was not jealous—jealous of Molly, when there had been dozens of others since he—

Dear God, was her humor driven utterly from her? Surely he had lost all power to hurt her now! And yet back there he was laughing with Molly, while Thirling could not even smile.

" Shall we turn back?"

Laurence was speaking beside her. Why, they must have driven a long way since they left Spinetti's! The moon had risen and was shining gloriously on the road before them. Thirling roused herself, and answered with an effort:

" Back? Why, yes, if you like."

She glanced at him. He looked very sane and dependable, sitting there. If Malcolm had been like that—but no, Malcolm was Malcolm.

She was treating Laurence dreadfully. She had scarcely spoken since they started on this ride. Still, what could she say? The old superficialities would not come. Surely she could speak her thoughts!

Would she have him see a woman spurned, disappointed, a jealous creature no longer able even to laugh?

She forced a banal remark about the trees against the moonlight sky. He murmured an answer; then silence fell once more.

They were nearing Spinetti's again. Thirling wished she had asked him to take the other road. Just before they reached the drive leading in to the road house, he slowed the car and asked if she would like to go in. She answered almost sharply:

"No! I'm not hungry, thank you!"

A motor was coming toward them from the house, and Laurence waited for it to pass. The car flashed by in the full glare of their headlight, and Thirling saw Malcolm—Malcolm laughing sidewise at Molly Gaines. Only a glimpse it was, then a red tail light swept up the road.

"I don't seem to remember that chap," Laurence said casually, as he started on.

Remember that chap! Remember! How amusing! If only Thirling could not remember him!

She sat with her eyes fastened on the red tail light as it fled before them. It seemed to mock her gayly with—

"I represent that which once held all your hopes, your plans, your future. Now watch me dance before you, a will-o'-the-wisp! Life is a mockery! Follow—follow me if you can!"

Her eyes ached with concentration. She seemed to have lost all power of feeling. She could only stare, stare at that red light.

Then, without warning, it was snuffed out, gone.

"Why!" She spoke her surprise aloud. "They've disappeared. I don't remember a curve there."

"They must have turned up the Skyline," said Laurence.

"The Skyline?" Then, with a burst of energy: "No! Not the Skyline!"

"Why, yes—it's just beyond this little dip, you know, where—"

"But they mustn't! Follow them quick!"

"Why, what—"

"A huge fallen tree! Roger and I were up there last night, and it may be there still! Quick! He doesn't know the road, and he speeds dreadfully."

Laurence turned off as she directed.

"A tree, you say? Let me get this straight!"

She told him in terrified, disconnected sentences, constantly interrupting herself to urge him to go faster, faster.

"You know this man?" he asked, when she had finished.

"I met him in France."

"Why, I didn't know you were in France!"

"Yes. There—we're at the top now! Isn't that a light? Oh, quick, quick!"

The wind seemed to rush upon them like a thing possessed. Thirling ducked her head against it and glanced sidewise at Laurence. He had slouched down to the wheel. His jaw was set, his eyes were fastened straight ahead. No need for her to hurry him now. He was going at the highest speed possible on that dangerous road.

"Are you afraid?" he asked presently.

"No!"

"If anything happens to Molly—" he said, a little later.

Thirling realized that for the last few minutes she had forgotten Molly. Yes—they were together, she and Malcolm, laughing to their doom. The picture of that great uprooted tree rose before her with such vividness that she had the instinct to cry loudly, shrilly, as if the wail might carry to their reckless ears.

A hoarse, peremptory sound was in Thirling's ears—a sound which she finally realized to be the horn. Laurence perhaps thought to warn them in this way. Or did he think they might have turned back? It was horrible, that raucous cry, like a foghorn in the dark—like death!

Thirling began to say something over and over again—the protest of her own heart against this suspense. She herself hardly realized what the words were:

"We must be almost there—almost there!"

And yet she was surprised when Laurence answered:

"Yes—almost."

With this the wind ceased to rush against her ears. She could lift her head and breathe. Then, high and shrill above the sound of their engine, came a woman's terrified scream. Instinctively Thirling crouched in the seat, and, as if to shut out a repetition of the sound, put her hands to her face.

The scream was not repeated. A great stillness seemed to press in upon her from every side.

Thirling removed her hands and lifted

her face slowly, fearfully. They were no longer in motion. Before her were the roots of the fallen tree. Otherwise the road was empty.

Laurence was already out of the car. He turned back to her.

"You wait here," he ordered.

The words pierced the numb terror that held her. She began to scramble from the car, crying:

"No! No! I'm coming with you! Wait!"

She knew that Laurence protested, but she did not listen. She was first to go over the edge of the road and to scramble down the steep rocky slope.

The clump of spruce had halted the other car's hideous plunge. The impact had snapped one of the trees off short, and the broken trunk had crashed through the top, utterly demolishing it. Half pinioned by the branches of this, his arms and legs grotesquely at variance with one another, was Malcolm's shattered figure.

Thirling reached him first. She did not even see Molly, who lay on the rocks where she had fallen from the car.

"She doesn't seem badly hurt," Laurence said. "Just a gash on the forehead, and I'm afraid a broken ankle."

Thirling wondered what he was talking about. She was impatient with him for mentioning trivialities in time of stress.

"Oh, can't you lift that tree?" she cried. "If we could lay him on the ground, I could tell whether—whether he is alive!"

He sprang forward then, and laid his strength to the tree. Together, they were able to release Malcolm and lay the big, inert body out upon a carriage robe.

The moon fell white and pure upon his face, which was white, with only a tiny gash upon the cheek. So alabaster pure was it that Thirling felt herself to be already looking upon death; but as she knelt to feel for his heart, the white lids slowly opened. She paused, scarce daring to breathe, waiting.

He seemed puzzled at finding her there, and yet not sorry. After a minute he managed a wry little smile, and said:

"You, Thirl?"

"Yes, Malcolm."

"Glad they—brought me here. Is it a dressing station?" Not waiting for her to answer, he struggled on: "Never thought I'd — go under. Always counted on my luck. But—but—"

His voice trailed off, and then started on again with greater strength.

"We had two weeks, anyway!"

His eyes were brilliant, uncanny in their awful grip on the last seconds of his fleeting life.

"Maybe it's better so. I'm not as good as you thought me. Afraid I couldn't—couldn't—"

He seemed to lose the thread of his discourse, and lay looking off into some infinity where she could not follow. Then he cried out in ringing anguish:

"My God! I wonder what death is like!"

His eyes closed. He muttered her name once—and was gone.

VI

"HE only touched life," said Thirling. "Mrs. Briggs said that, and it was true—true!"

A week had passed since Malcolm's death. Thirling had asked Laurence to take her out in his car, and for many minutes they had sat drawn up beside the road, while she told him the story.

"It all came clear to me that night," she went on, "after we had taken Molly home. I suppose it took a shock like that to restore my sense of values, my balance. It is a shame he had to go, when he loved life so; but since he did have to, I'm glad he thought he went out in defense of his country, rather than by his own foolish recklessness. I'm glad I was with him at the end, too; but I can realize now that the affair in France happened as it should have happened."

"You really feel that, Thirling?"

"Oh, yes! And I have no resentment against him now, no bitterness. He was as he was, just as Molly Gaines is as she is. She only touches, too, and you are right when you say that I am not like that. I think I envy them a little, skimming the surface with that joyous abandon; but I can't be like them. If I had married him, I would have lived the tragedy poor Tom lives every day of his life."

There was a short silence, and then she added:

"I'm still confused about myself. I don't know whether I've found the real Thirling yet; but if—if I only had some one to help—"

"Whom, dear?"

"Why, you!"

The Twisted Foot

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT WEST

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Rider of Golden Bar," etc.

XXIV

RETURNING to where he had seen the tracks of the barefooted horse with the hoofbreak, Buff picked them up without difficulty, and made a cast forward in the fashion of a huntsman whose hounds are off the scent. He made several casts forward, back, and to each side, but he found not another one of the telltale tracks, even though he went out to each end of town, where Main Street became the roads to Marysville and to Paradise Bend respectively.

Unhurriedly, for public conjecture as to the nature of his actions was a thing to be avoided, he began to inspect the near forefoot of every barefooted horse he could find in town. This business occupied the rest of the morning, and did not result in the discovery of the horse that had made the peculiar hoofprint.

After dinner he made a second and more successful attempt to go to the Blue Pigeon Store and pay the bill for the split-ear bridle.

Mike Flynn reached across the counter and solemnly shook hands with him. So did Joy Blythe, Mike's partner in the Blue Pigeon.

"What's the matter?" demanded the surprised Buff.

"For standing up for that blind man," explained Mike. "Yandle's cook told Joy here how come. Man dear, I'd like to have seen the row! The cook said you hit Yandle with everything but his desk, and throwed Calloway out on his ear. It must have been a pleasant sight. A couple of dirty dogs, those two lads! What if Fair has served time? He's served it. He's paid. I've got no use for folks that try to keep a man in the mud forever; and him blind, the poor fellah!"

"It's a shame," concurred Joy. "From what people tell me, there are only a few like Caltrop and Yandle, and that good-for-nothing Calloway, who are going out of their way to speak ill of the Fairs. The cattlemen I know say, 'Let the blind nester alone.'"

"But none of 'em are going out of their way to help the Fairs," Buff said with some bitterness.

"Human nature, Buff—human nature," said Mike. "But from what I hear the Fairs are being looked after right well. Never blush, lad—never blush. We're all friends here. Joy, I'm going down street. Be back in two twinkles."

"You're just the man I want to see, Buff," said Joy Blythe, when they were alone.

"I expect you've been wondering how soon I'd pay that bridle bill."

"Now that's a nice thing to say!" she reproached him. "As if I'd given your bill a thought! Just for that, I've a good mind not to tell what I've been saving up for you for the last two hours."

"I'm a worm," acknowledged Buff, "wriggling around on the floor. Tell me!"

"You don't deserve to be told, you sassy thing," she insisted, and, womanlike, told him in the next breath. "You know Miss Fair, don't you?"

"Why—uh—yes, I think I do," admitted Buff, reddening.

Joy twinkled her dark eyes at him.

"Oh, well, if you only *think* you know her, I shan't bother you. How do you like your new job?"

"I don't—I mean I do. Tell a fellah, that's my good girl!"

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"I'm not your good girl," returned Miss Blythe, highly pleased. "I'm not so hard up as all that—yet; but I'll tell you. Miss Fair made several purchases here yesterday, and after she left I found her leather poke full of money on the floor. I knew it was hers, because she had paid me out of it. I expect she'll worry when she misses it, and I thought maybe it was possible you might be riding out her way to-morrow or next day."

"I'm riding out there at once, if not sooner," cried Buff, holding out his hand. "Gimme, gimme!"

She handed him the fat leather poke, and he stowed it carefully away in the inner pocket of his vest.

"I'll remember you in my will," he told her gratefully. "How much did you say that bridle was?"

Within half an hour Buff, having first ascertained that the sheriff was up to the knees in a poker game at the Happy Heart, was riding to the Fair place the shortest way.

He struck Packsaddle Creek a couple of miles below the gully where the Tresawna incident had occurred. If he had been heading directly for the spot, he could not have come closer to where a horse had entered the stream at the time of high water. For the Farewell side of the creek was earth and mud, not sand, beneath the cut bank. Here were tracks in plenty, both where the other horse had torn the bank going down, and on what had been the muddy margin of the creek.

"He must have swum his horse," said Buff to himself, spurring Buster into the stream—for it was low water now, and Packsaddle could be forded anywhere.

It was odd that any one should swim the creek and get wet, when there was a ford two miles above—unless he was a stranger. Buff was interested in strangers. He splashed across and picked up the horse's tracks on the other side, and followed them through a break in the bank up to the level ground where the cottonwoods and willows grew. Here, in a little natural clearing, he dismounted; for he saw, around a willow, trampled ground indicating that the horse he was trailing had been tied there for several hours.

As he made Buster fast to a tree, he thought of the other time when he had done what he was going to do now. He recalled the terrific ache in body and soul that had come upon him when he had made his discovery of the peculiar hoofmarks and the prints of the small-booted foot. He never wanted to feel like that again!

"There's an explanation for it all," he told himself. "There's got to be. Those hoofmarks on Main Street may not mean a thing, or they may mean a whole lot. God knows what kind of man she's been meeting; but whoever he is, it's all right. It's got to be. She—she wouldn't have kissed me otherwise!"

He did not realize that he was protesting too much; nor did he realize that where one loves truly and greatly, motives are not questioned. It is not necessary to whip up some explanation, and one has a faith in the loved one that nothing can shake. His love for Gilian was true enough, but it was not yet great enough. There is a difference.

Examining the tracks around the willow, and from there back to the bank, Buff confirmed his primary opinion that they had been made at the time of high water. Casting forward, he found another willow with trampled ground around it where a second horse had been tied. Here he saw something that made him stoop and remain motionless, staring; for there in the trampled earth were the hoofmarks of a horse with a break in the wall of the outside quarter of the off fore hoof.

"Gilian's bay!" he muttered. "She told the truth about the quarter break!"

He continued his search. The ground was harder here than it was near the gully at the ford, so it was some little time before he found prints of boot heels. He found them presently, here and there, of two sizes.

The larger marks, some of them, were at the border of the stream, whither their maker had gone for a drink. There was nothing unusual about these marks. They had been made by ordinary boots of commerce worn by a person with normal feet. To Buff's eye they were a full size larger than those made by the boot of the Twisted Foot.

The smaller boots had not gone to the stream. Their owner had sat on the ground, when she had not been walking about. The larger-booted individual had also sat on the ground beside her—*beside her!*

Buff sat back on his heels and reconstructed the scene in his mind's eye.

"Here's where she came that morning

before Tresawna rustled those cattle. She stayed here some time, too—with this fellah. It wasn't the Twisted Foot—that's a cinch; but it sure was somebody she didn't want me to know anything about!"

So absorbed was he that he did not perceive the approach of another rider. The first warning that Buff had was when the rider splashed out of the creek within five yards of his back.

At the first sound to strike his ear, he whirled to face the creek, drawing his gun as he turned. A scramble, a heave, the screeching of saddle leather, and a bay horse thrust its way through the willows. Its rider was Gilian Fair.

At sight of Buff crouching there with drawn gun, the girl tossed up a defensive hand and uttered a startled:

"Oh!"

Buff, although as startled as she was, contrived to don his poker face. Brazen it out—that was the only thing to do. He stood up and holstered his six-shooter.

"'Lo!" said he. "For a minute I thought you were Mac Kergow come back."

"Mac Kergow come back!" she repeated stupidly.

Buff nodded.

"I think he's been here. I—uh—found his tracks."

"Indeed!" said she, her amber eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"I was riding over to your place. I—"

"I know," she interrupted. "Miss Blythe told me. I missed the money after I got home last night. I rode back to town this morning to see if I hadn't left it somewhere. I never thought I'd catch up with you."

"Neither did I," he returned, handing her the leather poke.

She stood near her stirrup, her hand on her horse's neck. He looked up at her gravely. He knew that she was very beautiful. Neither spoke for a space.

She was the first to break the silence.

"Miss Blythe told me what you did—and why," she said in a low voice.

He shook his head.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about what you did to Calloway and that lawyer," she explained, not lowering her brave gaze.

"You're mistaken. Nothing in that."

"Yes, there is, and I'm not mistaken. Yandle's cook listened and looked through the keyhole. She's a friend of Miss Blythe's. She told her. Miss Blythe told me. That's how I know."

His eyes dropped. He scruffled the horse's mane in his embarrassment.

"Well, what else could I do? I couldn't let them pass out a lie like that about your father."

What was that she was saying—something about the tale not being a lie? He looked up. Her eyes met his squarely.

"It's true," she said steadily.

He stared, incredulous.

"Don't you understand?" she said sharply. "My father spent ten years of a twenty-year sentence in the Stillwater Penitentiary. He was convicted on a charge of murder. We know he was innocent, but that makes no difference to the world. In its eyes he's a convict, and always will be. So now you know!" She gathered up her reins and mounted. Her chin was wabbly. So was her voice, as she added bitterly: "You'd better keep away from us. It won't do you any good to mix with a convict's family!"

He shifted his hand to her rein.

"Is that why you won't marry me?"

"Of course," she said simply. "I couldn't tell you about father. I—I didn't want it to be known here."

"I'd never have told any one."

"But if you'd known, you wouldn't have cared to marry me."

He possessed himself of her hand.

"Wouldn't I? Get down off that horse!"

She looked at him in a panic.

"You don't know what you're saying! My father isn't the only one they said was in this—this crime. They indicted my brother, and sent him to Stillwater, too."

"What difference does that make? Get down!"

She leaned from the saddle. Her eyes shone. Her lips parted in a smile to wring the heart.

"Do you mean it?"

The bay horse jumped to one side. It was a very quick dismounting.

XXV

She stirred in his arms—they were sitting together beneath a cottonwood—and asked the age-old question:

"When did you first begin to love me?"

He told her truthfully, and the answer must have pleased her, for she pulled his ears and kissed him. She was, thank Heaven, distinctly not one of these bread-and-butter *Miss Muffets* who believe that kisses should be given like pills, one every hour.

He kissed her thoughtfully. How he had misjudged this girl! Oh, the shame of it! What a blind, jealous fool he had been! What—his eyes, straying past and beyond her head, glimpsed the willow tree and the trodden earth around it. He recalled what he had for the moment forgotten—the other man.

"Look here, Gil!" said he. "Who have you been meeting here?"

"Whom? I was just going to tell you about him." She sat up within the circle of his arm, and slipped her arm around his neck. "I—ouch!" She whisked her arm away, and stuck a pink finger in her mouth. "Your star—I scratched my finger on it."

"Let me make it well!" he entreated.

She let him.

When the finger was satisfactorily itself again, he expected her to finish what she had started to say before the interruption; but she did not. She spoke of other things. This would never do. Buff wanted to know all about that stranger.

"What were you just going to tell me about the man you met here?"

Her frank eyes clouded.

"Nothing," she said.

"Yes, you were, too," he insisted. "I've got a right to know now."

"So you have," she admitted, and gently but none the less firmly disengaged herself from his embrace. "I'm glad you mentioned it."

The golden moment was over. The cake had become a cinder.

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded Buff.

She looked at him with level, luminous eyes.

"You don't trust me, do you?"

He was on his feet as quickly as she.

"Trust you? Of course I trust you!"

"No, you don't, or you wouldn't question my conduct."

"But you were going to tell me."

"I'm not now."

"But we're engaged, and engaged people don't have secrets from each other."

"You speak from personal experience, I suppose!"

"That ain't fair. I never was engaged before, and you know it."

"I don't know it, and you're not engaged—not to me, at least."

"What?"

"I told you."

"But you admitted that you loved me," he protested.

"I still do. Keep off! Don't touch me! Don't think for a minute that because I've broken our engagement I can stop loving you with equal facility."

"Why, Gil, I didn't mean—I don't care what you've done! I—"

Gilian winced as if he had struck her, and interrupted swiftly:

"You think that in meeting—in doing whatever I've done, I did something I shouldn't? Is that it?"

"I don't care what you are and what you've done," Buff declared desperately. "I love you, and I want you!"

Slowly her face whitened to the lips.

"You think—God knows what you think! You neither believe in me nor trust me! Love? You don't know the meaning of the word! You—"

She suddenly turned and darted to the trampled space surrounding the willow to which the horse of the small-booted person had been tied. In an instant she was back. Her face was no longer pale. It was red with some overpowering emotion. She faced Buff, her eyes blazing.

"You're lower than I'd have thought any man could be! Now I know why you've been making love to me—so that you could pry and spy and pull the wool over my eyes with pretty words, and find out what you wanted! I ought to have known it. I should have been warned when you accused me of coming here to Packsaddle before—before the time I found you fighting with Tresawna; but I didn't. And after you became a deputy, still I didn't quite believe. The other night, when you told father you had to get your knife out of your saddle pocket, I was even ninny enough to believe that! As if anybody kept a knife in a saddle pocket! But you can't fool me any longer. You were spying around out there by our cornfield. And over there by that willow bush"—she pointed with a furious arm—"are the marks of your feet where you stood and picked out my tracks in the dirt. Oh, you know they're my tracks, or you'd have said something about a woman having been here with Kergow, when you spoke of finding *his* tracks. Kergow! You know Kergow never came here! And I let you kiss me! I wanted you to kiss me! Oh, I could die of shame!"

But she did not die of shame. Far from it. She ran to her horse without a backward glance, leaving Buff Warren feeling very much as if he had been struck by a cyclone.

"I've got to catch her!" he said aloud, and ran to his own horse.

He gave Buster the spur, and soon had that excellent steed drawing up on the bay hoof over hoof. As he drew even with Gilian, she leaned over her saddle horn and spurred the faster.

"Wait a minute!" Buff was forced to bawl, so as to be heard above the drumming thunder of the hoofs. "Wait a minute, will you? You've got the wrong idea entirely. I don't know what you think I am, but whatever it is, I ain't it!"

Gilian did not so much as turn her head. For her, evidently, Buff had ceased to exist; but he was a persistent soul.

"I ain't spying on you," was the burden of his next shout. "Gimme a chance! I tell you I can explain everything!"

Thus, Buff shouting and roaring his pleas for a hearing, Gilian to all intents deaf as a post, they rode galloping toward the Lazy. If the circumstances had not been so tragic, the scene would have been farcical.

It ended by being ludicrous; for Gilian, whose stock of patience was not large, presently lost her temper outright, and slashed at Buff with her quirt. Buff, dodging, lost his hat, but contrived to grab the quirt. The weak wrist thong snapped immediately, and the quirt came away in his hand. Gilian made no attempt to recover it, and rode on, while Buff turned back for his hat. By the time he had recovered this article, the girl was so far ahead that, despite Buster's efforts, Buff was still half a mile from the Lazy when Gilian's bay entered the water.

Gilian was laying the bridle across the top of the blankets spread over her saddle when Buff rode up and dismounted.

"Here's your quirt," he said casually, holding it toward her. "You dropped it."

She took it, contempt and fury in her eyes. It was obvious that she was of two minds whether to strike him with it. For a moment she held the quirt; then she dashed it to the ground and stamped upon it furiously.

"I'll give you as much time to get out of sight," she snarled, "as it will take me to go down to the house and get my rifle. If I see you after I come out of the door, I'll shoot you the way I would any other skunk!"

"Feeling the way you do," said Buff warmly, "I don't blame you. I'd shoot myself, too. Go right ahead and smoke me up whenever you've a mind to. The way things are, I'd just as soon you would—sooner. I see most of your family away off yonder. I think maybe I'll traipse over there. Coming?"

Gilian made no reply other than to sit down on her saddle and burst into a raging flood of tears. Buff squatted beside her and patted her shoulders.

"There, there!" he said soothingly. "Have a real good cry. It 'll make you feel lots better."

At which she slapped him heartily, and well-nigh strangled in the effort to show him that she could stop crying if she wished. He rubbed a stinging cheek, and laughed. A slap was much better than a shot. As a rule you do not shoot at a person whom you slap.

The laugh had the effect of driving Gilian into a fresh paroxysm of weeping. Again Buff undertook to pour oil on the stormy waters.

"Look here! I ain't what you think. I've been making love to you, or trying to, anyway, because I think—because I know you're the best and finest and most beautiful girl I ever saw. Don't you let anybody tell you different."

He paused. It had struck him that perhaps he had been a trifle premature in demanding a chance to explain everything. Could he explain anything? Could he confess that he had been examining the tracks around the willow, that he had been out by the cornfield, and that he had heard—

On second thought he judged not. She had been so very bitter, and in the face of what had happened the best of explanations would march but lamely. He reached for his dropped reins.

"You take time, now, Gil, and think things over. I'll be yonder with the family if you want me for anything."

He looked over his shoulder as he slipped into the saddle, but she did not raise her head. As he rode, he wondered why on earth he continued to love this sharp-tongued being who reviled and berated him in such unrestrained terms.

The specter of the other man rose up to face him, and to add to his wretchedness. Who was this other man? What was the true inwardness of their meetings? One guess was as good as another. Suspicion, doubt, distrust, tore and clawed at Buff with vulture's talons. A red mist obscured his vision. Oh, to lay hands on the fellow! To batter him to earth and stamp him flat! To—the red mist lifted, and only the wretchedness remained.

Buff found all the family save Mr. Fair—whom he saw sitting in the sunshine near the cornfield — gathered around the dead body of a heifer. Mrs. Fair and Jemima were making an attempt to dress it. Buff slid from his horse and fished out his pocketknife.

"'Lo, folks!" said he. "Let me do that."

Mrs. Fair's face was grim as she returned his greeting. Jemima nodded. He could see that she and the twins had been crying. It certainly seemed to be an April day.

"Didn't you have enough meat?" he asked, running an expert blade around a leg joint.

"Plenty," replied Mrs. Fair. "The heifer was shot."

Buff sat back on his heels.

"When?"

"About an hour and a half ago. Beyond that little hill are the carcasses of four more."

"All shot?"

"All shot. We heard the shooting, and I ran out and cut their throats, so maybe we can save the meat."

"It 'll salt down all right," encouraged Buff. "Come in handy this winter. Where'd the shots come from?"

"Somewhere beyond the little hill—that is, the first four did. The last shot—the one that killed this heifer—came from the hilltop. I saw the smoke."

He looked at the hilltop in question.

"You ought not to have run out, Mis' Fair. Somebody might have taken a shot at you."

"I had to chance that," she replied, with a glint of defiance in her weary eyes. "I wanted to save the meat."

"Dressed the other ones yet?"

"Not yet."

"Then if Jemima can get the team hooked up, it would be a help. The sooner we get this meat hung the better."

Standing on the top of the little hill from which had come the shot that had killed the fifth heifer, Buff surveyed the landscape. He saw the carcasses of the other four heifers and the rest of the cattle grazing beyond them. The hilltop was stony, and he found no tracks.

He heard the wagon coming, and looked back carelessly. That wasn't Jemima driving. He narrowed his eyes and looked again. It was Bill Holliday. Buff went down the hillside to meet his cousin.

"That's a fine way to treat a friend!" bawled Bill, when he came within hearing distance. "Why didn't you tell a fellah you were coming out here to-day?"

"I didn't know you'd want to come," rejoined Buff. "You raised such a roar about coming here before, I decided not to try you this time."

"You decided! I'd sure like to know where you get license to decide anything for me! How do you know what I'd like?"

"Who gave you the bang on the cheek?" Buff evaded, perceiving a blue bruise on Bill's cheek bone.

"I fell down."

"You're a long-legged liar!" declared Buff, heaving a fore quarter into the wagon. "You've been fighting again."

"Well, so have you."

Buff looked hard at Bill.

"Did you hear something, too?"

"I guess I heard what you did. Anyway, I was taking a drink in the Happy Heart when I heard that no-account tinhorn Pencil Yandle say that Mr. Fair was a convict, and that there wasn't room in Farewell County for such folks. I started to slap Pencil up to a peak, and he went and pulled a knife on me, so I had to take it away from him."

"Do anything else to him?"

"Nothing to speak of. He kept clawing at me and kicking me in the shins, so I ran him out to the watering trough, and held him under for a while. He was all right after that."

Buff laughed with appreciation.

"Pencil sure has had a busy day! I guess I didn't work him over hard enough before I left town."

"You didn't—not by a long chalk. You couldn't wallop that jigger too much. Where d'you reckon those shots come from killed those four yonder?"

"Can't tell. She's a big scope of country behind this hill. Fellah might have been 'most anywhere. How come you changed so about these — uh — nesters, Bill?"

"They ain't nesters," denied Bill, with some heat. "I'm surprised at you saying so. They're farmers."

"Farmers, are they?" said Buff in a nasal singsong. "I'm beginning to be mighty suspicious of 'em myself. For all you know, they may have rustled every head they own."

Bill stared in amazement.

"Say, what are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Your very words," Buff told him calmly, "and not so very long ago, either."

Bill reddened to the back of his neck.

"We all make mistakes," he mumbled. "I—I got an idea—"

"Is that what you call her?" cried Buff, slapping his cousin between the shoulders with delight and a calloused hand. "Which one is it—Wilhelmina?"

"If I didn't have these mules to handle," yapped Bill, "I'd sure bust you one in the left eye! You hit me again, and I'll do it, anyway!"

"Is it Wilhelmina?" persisted Buff. "I'll bet it is, the way your ears are getting all pink! Wilhelmina! But ain't you robbing the cradle just a mite? The kid's not more than twelve."

"She ain't Wilhelmina, and she's going on seventeen. She told me so."

"Exchanging birthdays, huh? You ain't losing any time, are you? When is the happy day?"

"Not till she's eighteen." Bill sighed sadly. Then, recollecting himself, he snapped: "What business is it of yours, I'd like to know? You shut up!"

"Is our William losing his little temper? Is it getting angry? And its feathers are all fluffed up, so they are! Another good man gone! It's hard to believe. Courting a girl's all right, Bill, but you marry her, and what happens? It's Bill this and Bill that, till you can't rest. You'll have to chop the wood a month ahead. She won't let you smoke or drink. She'll make you wear slippers in the house—"

"Yeah!" said Bill, with an utterly fatuous smile. "She's promised to knit me a nice pair."

XXVI

"We've got to wiggle," declared Buff, when Bill stopped the wagon beside the first heifer of the four behind the hill. "We've only got an hour of sun."

"There's a lantern under the seat," said Bill. "Jemima said we'd need it."

Buff made no comment. Jemima and Bill! How smoothly matters were running in their case! Bill's deputyship seemed to be no bar to their happiness, while between Buff's lady and himself loomed a barrier reef of misunderstanding and intolerance.

"Fat heifer," observed Bill, rolling the carcass over on its back. "Dress four hundred, easy. Who you guess killed 'em?"

Buff shook his head.

"A fellah just can't tell. It might be Caltrop himself."

"Kergow is still loose," said Bill, looking over at the stand of timber six hundred yards away. "If he was in that timber now—"

"He ain't," returned Buff, "or he'd have shot at us before this. To my notion Kergow has flitted. He hasn't the sprawl Piper has."

Bill laughed.

"Tough luck we can't make anybody pay for this meat!"

"Maybe we'll be able to yet."

They finished dressing the heifer, loaded the quarters and the hide into the wagon, and drove on to the next carcass. Under one of the two-year-old's spike horns was a folded piece of paper. In an instant this was in Buff's hand. He opened it and read the following:

> To Abijah Fair—if you don't pack your stuff and drag it within two weeks, we'll begin shooting at your family instead of at your cows. We don't want a convict on this range.

The missive was written in printed letters and unsigned.

"Short and sweet!" said Bill, when he had read it. "I wonder is it Caltrop?"

"Maybe," repeated Buff abstractedly.

He was searching his memory in an endeavor to recall where he had previously seen T's crossed in that fashion—with an upstroke, the right arm longer than the left. The A's, too, struck a familiar chord. The left leg of every single one of them was longer than the right; but he could not remember where or under what circumstances he had seen those two distinctive letters.

Odd, though, that their appearance before his eyes should conjure up the sight of Bill Holliday—Bill Holliday singing songs in a state of intoxication. What was the connection? He gave it up, and turned to the business in hand. While he worked he discussed with Bill how they could best combat this new and most serious threat of the Fairs' enemies.

When the two deputies returned to the house, Gilian was nowhere in sight. That was just as well, thought Buff. Even though the girl had obviously reconsidered her hastily uttered threat to perforate him, she was in no mood for polite conversation.

He would give her time to get over her outburst, and she would come around after thinking things over. How could she help it? He hadn't done a thing to warrant her remarks, and her common sense would show her—

Would it, indeed? Doubt assailed him. He yearned to take the lady of his heart by the shoulders and shake her soundly. It was undoubtedly what she needed.

Drearily he stepped down over the wheel, and, by the light of the lantern, helped Bill to unload the beef. After they had hung the quarters in preparation for the work of salting, and had eaten the hot supper that Mrs. Fair had placed in the oven against their coming, Buff drew the lady out to the wagon, on the pretense of showing her a loose hind tire.

He showed her the note, instead. She read it in silence. Buff did not look at her.

"They seem determined to get rid of us," was Mrs. Fair's comment, when she had finished reading. "We'll stick!"

Buff raised his eyes in admiration.

"You've plenty of nerve, ma'am. I wouldn't know what advice to give you."

He wondered whether Gilian had made known to her mother the state of her feelings toward Buff. If she had, certainly no impression had been made on Mrs. Fair. She was treating him as she always did—with perfect friendliness and courtesy.

She tapped the note with a work-worn finger.

"I wonder who wrote this!"

He shook his head.

"Hard to tell. From what I've heard, most of the cow folks haven't any hard feelings against you since—since—"

He floundered.

"Since they've learned of my husband's blindness," she finished for him, with the utmost calmness. "Human nature is pretty decent, take it all around, but—"

"Some folks are always blisters," he supplied. "Bill and I have got our eyes on one in particular. He may be at the bottom of this. Anyway, we're riding over to his place to let his hammer down—if it is him. If it ain't, we'll just have to keep our eyes skinned."

She nodded.

"I don't know what to do about the cattle. We can't keep them in the corral all the time. They must eat. They'll have to take their chance, I guess."

"If I were you, I'd run 'em on the flats across the Lazy, where anybody who tries to ride up on 'em will be in sight for miles. One of the twins can hide out in the cottonwoods along the river and keep a lookout. Then at night you can corral 'em; but you'll have to watch the corral. I never thought of that."

"Gilian and I can manage between us."

"You might get shot," said Buff nervously. "I was figuring you'd stay indoors a lot from now on; because, if it ain't the fellah I think it is, the open air will be bad medicine."

Her lined face was grim.

"We'll have to take our chances with the cattle, Mr. Warren. People who aren't willing to fight for what's their own haven't any right to own anything."

At the vision of one of these women, perhaps both, stopping a bullet, Buff's heart almost turned over.

"I'll ride down this way whenever I can," he assured her; "and so will Bill."

The expression of fright that shadowed her face as he said this vanished as quickly as it came; but Buff's eyes were sharp.

"Gilian's told her!" he thought.

"You mustn't bother about us," said Mrs. Fair hurriedly. "We'll be all right. You mustn't neglect your work on our account. You've done so much already," she concluded lamely.

"No trouble, ma'am. That notice, now—I'd like to take it along with me, if you don't mind."

She handed it to him without a word.

From the Fair place the two men rode directly to the Eighty-Eight Ranch. Having ridden most of the night, they ran Caltrop to earth in his office at half past eight in the morning.

"Look here!" said Buff. "Somebody's making threats against the Fairs."

"Nothing to do with me," declared Caltrop, passing the back of his hand across his young beard. "I ain't the somebody."

"Maybe not; only if any of that family is hurt by anybody, and we can't find out who that anybody is, we'll wait on you."

"Wait on me?"

"Both of us, and we'll ventilate you plenty, on sight."

Sam looked none too pleased at this.

"But suppose I don't have a thing to do with—whatever happens?"

"There ain't any suppose about it. You better see that nothin' happens—that's all."

"If you don't like it," chimed in Bill with some truculence, "you can set your gun a going right now!"

"Wouldn't you like to see me gamble with you?" rejoined Caltrop, with a toothful smile. "Don't slam the door when you go out."

The two withdrew backward. They did not trust Sam Caltrop quite as far as they could follow him with their eyes.

"I wonder will that do any good?" worried Bill, when they were a mile on their way to Farewell.

"So far as Sam is concerned, I think it will," opined Buff. "Sam's a cautious hand, give him time to think. Cheer up, Bill," he added after a glance at his comrade's anxious face. "Didn't we decide Sam is at the bottom of this? Well, then—"

But Buff was not quite as confident of the outcome as his cocksure words would indicate. He had an uneasy feeling that throughout their interview Sam had been inwardly laughing at them. Harsh experience had taught him that when people like Sam Caltrop laugh inwardly and inexplicably, it behooves a wise man to sit low in his timber and take thought for the future.

XXVII

Two days later, with an eye out for the safety of the Fair family, Buff came again to the place on Packsaddle Creek where Gilian and he had had their golden moment. His thoughts were none too happy as he kicked his horse across the stream, caught him short by the head, and scrambled him up the bank and through the willows into the small natural clearing.

He checked Buster and stared around him. So much had passed in the interim that it seemed as if the place must have changed; but it was the same as ever, at first glance. Willow and cottonwood and trampled grass, his eyes took in the scene, his brain registered its impressions.

Preparing to ride on, Buff lifted his reins, when a chance gust of the sultry summer breeze bent and parted a tuft of weed, revealing a folded newspaper.

"Was that here when I was?" he asked himself, dismounting and crossing to pick it up.

Creased by travel in saddlebag or pocket, worn by the alternate wetting and drying of dew and sun for many days, it bore a two-month-old date line and the name of the St. Paul *Dispatch*, a paper published in the capital city of the State of Minnesota. By its appearance Buff judged that it had lain under the tuft of weed at least since the time of high water — since the time when the tracks of the horses tied to the willows had been made.

Having unfolded it to the full, his gaze mechanically traveled across the headlines, and was naturally arrested by the most striking, which announced in half-inch letters that there had been a sensational jailbreak at Stillwater Penitentiary, resulting in the escape of a convict. Reading down the column, Buff gathered that Jack Fair, serving twenty years for the murder of his uncle, had overpowered a keeper, stolen the keys of the doors admitting him to the yard, scaled the outer wall by means of a paint shop ladder, and disappeared in the darkness of an extraordinarily dark night.

"Can this be our Jack?" he muttered, and read further.

The account went on to mention Jack's father, Abijah Fair, whose blindness had won him a pardon. With great wealth of detail, it served up anew the story of the crime for which Jack and his father had been convicted. There was even a picture of Jack, good as newspaper pictures go, with the young man's description beneath it. Among the escaped convict's characteristics was a long scar on the inner side of his right wrist.

Buff raised his eyes from the newspaper and looked into the face of the man himself. He also looked into the barrel of a remarkably steady six-shooter held by the man. He did not require the command, "Hands up!" They shot aloft mechanically, the newspaper rustling in his fingers.

"This is so sudden," said Buff calmly. "I wasn't expecting you, old-timer, but I'd know you anywhere. Allowing for your hardscrapple beard, you're the same handsome fellah who got his picture in the paper; and that scar on your right wrist—I can see it quite plain where your sleeve's pulled back."

The other did not smile. His expression was very grim as he catfooted toward Buff.

"Wait!" said Buff suddenly. "Are you thinking of taking away my gun?"

"That was my general idea," replied Jack Fair, halting.

"Then get over the idea. I don't mind your holding me up. In your present state of mind, that's natural; but taking my gun is barred. If you think you can take it, I'll try to show you that the hand is quicker than the eye. Be reasonable, man! I don't want to arrest you."

Jack Fair's white teeth showed in a mirthless smile.

"Why don't you want to arrest me?"

"Because you can help your family, and God knows they need help. Bill Holliday and I can't be there to look after 'em all the time. If I know you're hanging around, it will sure take a load off my mind."

"I'll bet it will! You can pass the news on to that fat Tobias fellah, and have him do the dirty work, so you won't get in bad with my sister, huh? Think I don't know?"

"Let's leave your sister's name out of it," Buff suggested evenly.

"Let's have your gun first," returned Jack Fair, advancing again.

In front and slightly to the right of Buff he halted, and stretched out a hand to take the deputy's gun. Instantly there was movement lively and brisk. A shot rang out. A newspaper fluttered one way, a man's hat flew another. Jack Fair bent backward, and then sat down on his shoulder blades with a force that made him grunt.

He struggled to a sitting position, and nursed an aching wrist. Buff sat down, his back against a cottonwood, his boot heels teetering on his spur rowels. Carefully he laid Jack's smoking revolver across his lap. His grave gaze never left the face of Mr. Fair.

"That was right down careless of you," said he. "After I warned you, too! Don't you know that one of us might have got shot—me, for a safe bet?"

"Shut up!" Jack Fair growled impolitely. "Go ahead and put the cuffs on me, but there's nothing in the rules about talking a man to death!"

"I'm not going to arrest you. Can't you get that through your thick skull?" Then, as Jack Fair looked incredulous, Buff added: "Fact! I'm doing my damnedest to be friendly. Officially, you understand, I don't know a thing about any jail break at Stillwater; but I'm telling you, for your own good, you ought to know better than to leave papers like that one lying around. Suppose some other fellah saw it—the sheriff, for instance? Where would you be? That beard of yours is too spindling a growth for you to hide in. Now look here—will you look after your folks all you can from now on?"

"You going to turn me loose?"

"I said so. Bill and I won't bother you—and we won't tell the sheriff."

Jack Fair continued to stare.

"Is this a trick?"

"Call it anything you like," drawled Buff, more than a little put out with this loose-headed person. "You going to do as I say about your family?"

"With reservations. I'll keep an eye out for you and your sheriff at the same time."

"You needn't; but if it makes you any happier, hop to it. You know what's happened lately to your family?"

When the other shook his head, Buff told him of the five heifers. Jack Fair left off nursing his wrist and swore.

"Cussing won't help much," suggested Buff. "You can see now what they're up against, and that they need a man around the place."

"I'll look out for 'em," said Jack Fair shortly. "Gimme my gun!"

"No hurry! I want to unload it first. Do you ride a grullo horse?"

"No—mine's a blue-gray."

"Same thing. Grullo is what they call a blue-gray down in New Mexico, where I was once. While I think of it, were you out back of the cornfield at your pa's place on the night of—"

Buff gave the date.

"What's that to you?" young Fair gruffly inquired.

"Just asking, that's all. I think I was there the same night—at the house."

"I know you were. They told me. What you grinning at all of a sudden?"

"Man, you've taken another one of those loads off my mind! Here's your gun. It's unloaded, too. I'll just get my rifle, if you don't mind. I want to see you safe out of sight across the creek."

"But I ain't going that way. I'm going to our place."

"No, you ain't—not for a while. I'm riding over to your place myself. After sunset you can come in. I'll be gone by then; but you can easy see it would never do for you and me to ride there together. Suppose somebody saw us, what do you guess would happen to my reputation? So you do as I say. Aunty knows best!"

Buff made very certain that Jack Fair was obeying orders before he resumed his journey.

He found Gilian astride a stitching jack on the shady side of the stable. At his cheerful greeting she vouchsafed him merely a sultry glare, and went on with her work almost as if he was not there. Almost? Nay, quite.

He dismounted and stood at ease, his quizzical eyes upon her, his fingers lazily rolling a cigarette.

"Does my presence disturb you?" he drawled.

"No."

"I was wondering, because you've been working both those needles in and out of the same hole ever since I arrived."

Her cheeks crimsoned beneath the tan.

"I wish you'd go away!"

"I want to ask you a civil question. The last time I saw you, you told me you'd shoot me if I wasn't out of sight by the time you got your gun; but when Bill and I came down to the house with the wagon load of beef, I didn't see you anywhere around. How come? You run out of cartridges or something?"

She made no reply. Her attention was apparently concentrated on her work. At least the needles and thread progressed from hole to hole. Buff perceived this, and smiled.

"You're really doing some work now; but lemme tell you something—you ought not to threaten folks unless you intend to make good."

At this she so far forgot herself as to stamp a foot at him and point dramatically into the distance.

"Go!"

He immediately sank down on his heels.

"Sure—I'll be glad to stay. All you have to do is ask me."

"Oh!" she blazed. "I—I—"

"I'll be glad to marry you any time," he supplied helpfully. "Is that what you're leading up to?"

"You—you—"

"I and you!" he murmured tenderly. "Always! Why, only this afternoon I—no, I guess I won't tell you. I'll let you find it out—dearest. There, I said it! I knew I'd call you that some day!"

"Will you go? Oh, if there were a man here!"

"There is—I'm him. What you want done? Gosh, you look mighty pretty with your eyes flashing thataway!"

Gilian found words at last.

"Never mind my eyes. I hate you! Do you understand? I hate you! *Now* will you go?"

"You ain't giving me a square deal," he complained, without moving. "But you don't mean all you say. Anyway, you still love me—I know that."

"I don't! I don't! I did once, because I didn't know any better. I couldn't help myself; but—but I'm utterly indifferent to you now."

"A minute ago you said you hated me."

"I hate a spy! You can't fool me. You want to arrest—"

She bit the sentence short with an audible click of her white teeth.

"I want to arrest—" he prompted.

"Oh, go on about your business!"

"Now look here, I can't explain things—officially; but won't you believe me when I tell you that I'm not trying to spy on you or any member of your family, and that everything is all right so far as I'm concerned? Say, be human for once. I love you—you know that. Tell me you believe me!"

"I don't believe you."

"You will, and mighty soon, too. Good Lord, I don't see why you're so fussy! You let Bill come around. He's seeing Jemima. Why can't I—"

"I don't let Bill come around. I have nothing to do with his visiting Jemima. If she wants to be a fool, that's her affair."

"So it is—I hadn't thought of that. Careless of me, wasn't it? Well, I guess I'll be leaving you for the present." He rose to his feet and shook a solemn forefinger at her. "I know what's the matter with you—you're upset and nervous and crotchety. To-night, before you go to bed, get your ma to give you a large, heaping spoonful of sulphur and molasses; and if she'll throw in a spanking it 'll be a help, you crosspatch! You mark me now, young lady, I'm going to make you eat every last one of your unkind words before you're a whole lot older!"

With that he swept her a low bow and departed houseward, leading his horse. At the house he found Mrs. Fair, and made inquiry concerning the well-being of the family and its possessions. There was nothing untoward to report, and Buff, feeling more at peace with the world than he had for many a long day, started back to Farewell in the sunset glow.

After unsaddling at the hotel corral, Buff went in search of his cousin, Bill Holliday. In their mutual room at the hotel he found that gentleman carefully cleaning his extra six-shooter.

"How come?" inquired Buff, eying the work in hand.

"Kergow's in town," replied Bill. "It seems to me the easiest way out is just to abolish him good."

Buff shook his head.

"We ain't private citizens any more. We're officers of the law, and we can't go around shooting promiscuous. We've got to have a reason before we down anybody."

"He was with Piper that night over at the Fair place. Ain't that reason enough?"

"If we could prove it—only we can't. There's more than one way of penning wild burros. How's this for an idea?"

He continued to speak for five minutes. At the conclusion of his speech Bill said:

"It won't work."

"I think it will," insisted Buff. "You do your part. Let's go!"

They went downstairs, to part at the entrance of the hotel. Bill struck off in one direction, Buff in the other. The latter's immediate goal was Kergow. He found him at last in the Happy Heart.

Kergow watched Buff's approach with a suspicious stare, but made no move toward his gun.

"'Lo, Mac," said the deputy, with the easy affability of one in drink, as he came to anchor at Kergow's right hand. "How's tricks up at Paradise Bend?"

"All right."

"Tex Piper got back ahead of you."

The roughened thickness in Buff's voice would have deceived almost any one. Kergow's face was impassive.

"Did he?"

Buff nodded.

"We have him in jail here for a lil business he got mixed up in. We're trying to find out who was with him. So far he ain't opened up, but he's bound to weaken."

"Think so?"

"I know it. He can't stand going without food forever."

"Huh? You ain't starvin' him?"

"Sure are! Of course, we don't like to do it, but the circumstances are unusual. We've got to know who was with him that time he tried to burn out the Fairs. You see, this side kicker of his shot two heifers and mighty near wiped out Bill. Bill, he's plenty mad about it; so between us we're doing what we can."

"How long's he been going without grub?"

"Couple of days. He's beginning to weaken—I can see it. He groans and complains so at night we had to move him into the outside cell at the southeast corner of the jail, so the other prisoners could get some sleep. Of course, unless we're overcrowded, we don't keep folks in that cell. It's a mighty poor place for an important prisoner like him, with that window so close to the ground you can reach through the bars and shake hands with the fellah outside; but Joe makes us inspect the bars twice a day, so I guess it's safe. It 'll have to be. Have a drink, Mac?"

They had one together, and then Mac Kergow pleaded weariness and took his way out into the night. Buff grinned happily at nothing, and bought two expensive cigars. He stuck one in his mouth, lit it, and wandered across the room to watch a game of draw. He did not seem to have a care in the world.

We will now turn our attention to the movements of Mr. Kergow subsequent to his departure from the saloon. He first went hastily to Calloway's store and bought six cans of sardines, six cans of peaches, one can opener, two hack saws, two dozen saw blades, two stone chisels, and a hammer. It must be said that Mr. Kergow was a person of a singularly direct and practical habit of mind.

With his purchases in a sack, Kergow annexed an empty cracker box and proceeded by a devious route to the jail, arriving presently—and furtively — beneath the barred window of the cell at the southeast corner.

By standing on the cracker box, he was enabled to bring his head and shoulders on a level with the window bars. It being a warm night, the glassed sash was swung wide. No sooner had Kergow inserted his pug nose between the bars than a heart-rending groan from the darkness of the cell assailed his ears.

"Here, Tex!" he whispered loudly. "I got something for you!"

"I hope it's some grub!" a hoarse voice whispered back. "I'm starving to death!"

Kergow immediately began to pass through the bars the contents of the sack, reserving for his own purposes one hack saw, one dozen blades, the chisels, and the hammer.

"Keep up your nerve!" he encouraged the cell's occupant, who took all that was given him and begged for more. "Open up them sardines and peaches, and you'll feel better. I'll get a going with this hack saw, and at the finish we can bust the bars with the chisels and hammer."

"Fix this saw for me," came the hoarse whisper in return. "You can do that while I eat. I can feel there's something the matter with it."

Kergow poked his forearm through the bars. Cold metal touched the heel of his hand and encircled his wrist, and something clicked loudly.

Kergow endeavored to jerk back his arm, but his hand remained fast held. He gritted his teeth, the cold sweat starting out on his low forehead, and pulled with all his might. He only succeeded in abrading the skin of his wrist.

"I wouldn't pull too hard," said a calm voice, with no suggestion of hoarseness in its dry tone. "The other handcuff is locked to a ring bolt in the wall. I'll go get Buff."

"No need," declared that gentleman himself, appearing from around the corner of the jail, and striking a match, the better to observe the man he had caught. "As I live, my old friend Mac Kergow, caught in the act! Jail breaking, whether into or out of, is a serious offense, Mac. You ought to have known better! You got any evidence, Bill?"

A match flared within the cell.

"Plenty evidence," was the reply.

"Plenty out here, too," said Buff; "hack saws, chisels, and such, not to mention the gentleman himself. Mac, you — there, there, I'll get your gun! Don't bother your head about trying to hand it to me. Thank *you!* Speaking serious, Mac, you oughtn't to believe all you hear from a drunk man. I was just having a little joke when I said Tex was in this cell. He ain't. He's eating three meals a day, too, and getting fat and flossy by the minute. Watch Mac, will you, Bill, while I go get the sheriff and a couple of witnesses to look at our prisoner before we lock him up?"

XXVIII

On the 14th of the month, Piper and Kergow having been held for the grand jury after their hearings before Judge Dolan, the sheriff endeavored to save his face by sending Buff and Bill to the Sweetwater country, as per his original order.

On the night of the 17th a big wind blew out of the south from an hour after sunset until dawn. Throughout the night it howled and yelled and danced among the houses and corrals of Farewell, filling the eyes of passers-by with dust, and their ears with such a clamor that one speaking with another was forced to shout to make himself understood.

On the morning of the 18th Buff and Bill returned from the Sweetwater. After turning their horses and the pack horse into the sheriff's pasture, they went to the office to report. The door was locked. This was at eleven in the morning.

The two sat down on the step to wait. Noon came, but it did not bring the sheriff. They went to the hotel for their dinner. When they returned, the door was still locked.

"He doesn't lock it during the day unless he's out of town," offered Bill.

"He can't be out of town," said Buff. "You saw his saddle horses in the pasture. Let's go around to the kitchen."

The kitchen door was unlocked, as usual —the office being the only room in the sheriff's house upon which he ever turned the key. The two deputies entered. The kitchen was silent. Everything was in order, for the sheriff was a remarkably neat housekeeper. The stove was cold. The dish towel hanging on the line above it was dry to the touch of Buff's fingers.

"Joe hasn't wiped a dish this morning," he said.

"He didn't wind the clock last night, either," observed Bill, looking at the alarm clock on a shelf above the kitchen table.

The clock had stopped at a quarter past twelve.

"Joe!" called Buff.

There was no response; but, their ears on the alert, they heard a sound—a low, scarcely audible sound, which even the slight noise of their entry and moving about had sufficed to smother.

"What's that?" asked Buff.

"Sounds like a telegraph wire on the buzz," said Bill.

"'On the buzz' is right. Bees make the same noise when they swarm."

"Whatever it is, it's in the bedroom."

The bedroom opened off the kitchen. Buff lifted the latch and pushed the door open slowly. Why slowly, he did not know. The murmur that might have been the hum of a telegraph wire, or of bees at swarm, became a decided buzz; but it was not created by either wires or bees. It was caused by flies—a good many flies.

"God!" exclaimed Buff.

Bill, looking with horrified eyes across his cousin's shoulder, shuddered. Buff approached the bed. The flies, at his approach, flew up in a cloud. All abroad on the bed, in his nightshirt, lay the body of the sheriff. His throat had been cut from ear to ear.

"The blood on the sheets ain't dry yet," said Buff. "He was killed last night some time."

A thought came to Buff. He stretched forth an arm, plucked the sheriff's trousers from the chair beside the bed, and felt in a pocket for the jail keys. No keys of any description were to be found.

Together the two deputies walked—unhurriedly, that comment might not be aroused—to the jail. This building was situated at the other end of town.

They discovered the jail door shut, but not locked. They entered the front room, which, until the incumbency of Sheriff Mack, had been used as an office. The cell doors, four in number, two on each side, opened off this room.

Every door stood open. Every cell was empty.

"We won't tell Nap Tobias yet awhile," said Buff, when they had quartered the ground in the immediate vicinity of the jail, and had found not a single legible track of man or beast. "Not till we've combed out the sheriff's house. He'd only bull around, anyway, the bufflehead, and he can do that after we've made a search, just as well as before."

"Better," amplified Bill.

Accordingly they returned to the sheriff's house and what lay within. The office, the bedroom, the storeroom, the small spare room, and the kitchen, they searched with thoroughness; but neither in the house itself, nor on the worn turf surrounding it, did they find any clew whatsoever. So far as they were concerned, the coroner's verdict was already in:

"Death at the hands of a person or persons unknown."

Buff, sitting on the kitchen table, rolled a meticulous cigarette. He scratched a match alight, lit the brown roll, and shook out the match. He did not throw the match in the general direction of the stove, as he would have done had the kitchen been less clean and tidy. The kettle and an empty saucepan were over the top of the oven. The lid lifter stuck up from the front lid of the fire box.

Naturally, Buff lifted this lid. His hand paused in the act of dropping in the dead match. He stopped and stared.

There in one corner, where it had fallen after being dropped through the pothole, was a piece of paper twisted into a spill. Buff knew that the sheriff abominated spills. He invariably used matches, when a match was to be had. There was an open box of matches ready to hand.

Buff dropped his dead match into the white ashes and picked up the half burned spill. He untwisted it carefully, and smoothed it flat on the top of the stove. There were words printed with pen and ink on the piece of paper. Evidently a message filling half the left-hand portion had been burned away in the partial consuming of the spill. What remained ran in this wise:

> . . . ready to-morrow night
> and Holliday have
> be back until
> saddles are at

Beneath the remnants of these four lines was a large figure 2.

"What have you found, Buff?" asked Bill.

"Look here!" said Buff. Taking the message he had found under the dead heifer's horn, he opened it and laid it beside the other. "The same fellah printed both of 'em. Same kind of cross over the T's, same kind of sidehill A's."

"What's that figure 2 mean?"

"I'll never tell you. I've seen it before, I'm almost sure, but I can't remember where."

He did not say that this fragmentary letter and the figure 2 aroused precisely the same recollection as had the one discovered at the Fair place—his cousin Bill drunk as a fiddler. The fact seemed too trivial to mention.

"You mean you've seen that '2' signed to another letter somewhere?"

"Yeah."

"I should think you could remember where, then. Scratch the old head and think!"

"No use. I've tried. Maybe it will come to me later."

"I wonder what Nap Tobias would make of this piece of paper!"

"He'd rub his three chins and say something like, 'Well, that fire must have been pretty nigh out, or it would have burned up the paper.' Then he'd take the paper and rush around all over town, showing everybody his clew. His clew! Not that I mind the nitwit hogging the credit. He'll do that anyway, but he'll scare the game with his hollering, and then they'll play their cards so close to their belts that after that it will be harder than ever to land 'em. And it's a job for six good men right now, let alone a man and a half—ouch, that's my pet ankle!—and a boy, then. If you swing that leg at me again, I'll bust you one with the poker. So we won't show either of these notes to Nap Tobias nor anybody else."

"You want whoever put it in the stove to think it was burned up, huh?"

"That's the general idea," replied Buff in a weary tone.

"Then you must think it's somebody here in town."

"Or in the neighborhood of town. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we'd had a drink with No. 2 more than once."

"I wouldn't be surprised, either, judging by most of your friends I've had a drink with. Have you any particular one in mind?"

"Sh-h-h! Don't tell anybody," Buff said mysteriously, his finger on his lips.

"I won't," said Bill, preparing himself for revelations.

"That's right—don't tell a soul! We'll go see Nap now!"

Buff swung off the table and started toward the door.

"But you haven't told me who—" Bill began to protest.

"I wouldn't have believed it of him," Buff flung back over his shoulder. "You could have knocked me down with a feather. Coming, Bill?"

Bill came, specifying in a low, tense tone precisely what his cousin could do.

They found Nap Tobias sleeping off the effects of a late dinner. His wife, who at first demurred at awakening him, told them that her husband had ridden in not an hour before from Cutter, whither, it transpired presently, he had gone on official business connected with some handcuffs and a Winchester that had been borrowed and not returned by the Cutter marshal. Mrs. Tobias, whom the two deputies did not take into their confidence, was at length persuaded to awaken her snoring husband.

Fat Nap Tobias sat on the edge of the bed and blinked at Buff as the latter made a brief report of what he had found in the sheriff's house. The chief deputy, when a realization of what had come to pass finally penetrated his sleep-befuddled brain, began to pull on a boot at a great rate.

"Why didn't you come tell me right away," he grumbled, "instead of searching the house by yourselves?"

"I kind of thought you wouldn't be back from Cutter yet," soothed Buff, who had not had the slightest inkling that Nap had been out of town until informed of the fact by Mrs. Tobias.

"I don't know how you knew I was out of town," puffed Tobias, making heavy weather of the second boot. "The sheriff didn't tell me to go till yesterday, three days after you left for the Sweetwater."

"He told me before we left that you were going to Cutter in a couple of days," Buff lied with the utmost ease. "That's how I knew."

"Humph!" grunted Nap. "Was—was Joe robbed?"

"Guess he was. We didn't find a dime anywhere."

"I don't understand it," said Nap helplessly, easing his fat shoulders into his vest. "Who'd kill Joe, I'd like to know?"

"If I knew, I'd tell you," was the dry reply.

"Did you find any clews?"

Buff shook a sincere head.

"Not a clew; but I'll gamble that after you let your eagle eye sift over the landscape, you'll find a dozen."

Nap looked sharply at Buff, but the latter's face was innocently bland.

Bill choked and strangled.

"These sore throats," he said apologetically, meeting the chief deputy's eyes, "they make a feller cough."

"You'll have a chance to look after that sore throat from now on, you and Buff," Nap said sharply.

"Meaning?" Buff struck in.

"The agreement for you two to be deputies was with the sheriff. He's cashed. I'm the boss now, and I don't believe I can use you fellers any more."

"Oh, yes, you can!" contradicted Buff. "You wouldn't turn us out into a cold, cold world. We know too much!" He leaned over, put his mouth close to Nap's ear, and added in a hoarse whisper: "Do you want us to tell your wife about—you know what?"

Nap jumped as if shot.

"You keep your infernal mouths shut!" he commanded anxiously. "You can be deputies as long as you like."

"I wonder what it is that Nap doesn't want us to tell his wife!" chuckled Buff, when, later, he and Bill were alone. "I guess fat men are all alike!"

XXIX

"Say, look here, Pencil!" said Sam Caltrop petulantly. "Freeing those prisoners was a bright piece of work, but I don't know why you had to kill the sheriff. Not that I ever liked Joe, but wiping out a man unnecessarily is always foolish."

"Quite right!" concurred the lawyer, regarding his erstwhile friend with venomous eyes. "I agree with you."

"Then why did you do it?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't."

"Huh? How do you mean, you didn't?"

"I didn't kill Joe or free the prisoners."

Sam surveyed Yandle with narrowed eyes.

"I don't know whether you're lying or not."

"Does it make any difference?"

"On the whole, yes." Suddenly Sam grinned. "I believe you, Pencil, thereby saving your fee."

For a moment Yandle looked blank. Then he snarled:

"You'll pay me, anyway. My plans were almost perfected. I'd have got the boys out next week."

"I only pay for completed work," chuckled Sam, thoroughly happy in the thought that he was saving money.

"You'll pay me, all the same," insisted Yandle.

"Don't you fool yourself! So far as I'm concerned, your usefulness is ended."

"Is that so? And suppose I don't choose to agree with you?"

"You can't help yourself. So long as those boys were in jail, I needed you—a little. Now they're out, I don't; so there you are. Take it or leave it. I'm watching you, you pink-eyed rodent!"

This last remark was called forth by a convulsive but unfinished movement of Yandle's right hand. The lawyer smiled.

"You're always so damned crude, Sam!" he cooed sweetly. "There's no need for a display of firearms here. Besides, I don't believe you're a very good shot with a derringer."

Caltrop did not withdraw his weapon from sight.

"I haven't forgotten where you wear your knife. You won't work that game on me again!"

"I told you to bolt that door, Caltrop!" Yandle snarled with apparent irrelevance.

"Why did you need to have it bolted?" Buff Warren, who had opened the door in question, spoke in his mildest tone. "Are you and my genial friend, Mr. Caltrop, plotting something devilish? And may I ask why Mr. Caltrop is sliding a derringer up his sleeve? Upon my word," he declared in tones of righteous indignation, "I believe there is more in this than meets the eye!"

Buff, while speaking, had been unobtrusively drifting toward Yandle. As he uttered the last word, he dropped a hand familiarly on Yandle's shoulder. Not till then did the lawyer perceive that the lanky form of Bill Holliday stood framed in the doorway giving into the inner mysteries of his residence.

Buff, following the lawyer's glance, smiled.

"Your friend Tex gave me that idea—coming in the back way, I mean. Will you come along quiet, Pencil, or would you rather be handcuffed?"

Yandle may be said to have bounced in his chair.

"What?"

"Don't excite yourself," Buff soothed him. "Bad for the heart. You're being arrested, that's what. Don't wriggle! Is that a dirk I see under your coat? Let me see. It *is* a dirk! Don't snatch, or—"

Yandle stuffed his handsomely rapped knuckles into his mouth.

"What is the charge?" he demanded, when he could control his rage and his voice.

"Assisting prisoners to escape from the

custody of the law, and the murder of the sheriff of this county."

Yandle blanched. Sam Caltrop looked thoughtful.

"I guess I'll be going," said the latter.

"Why sure, Sam," Buff told him cordially. "There's no charge against you."

"I don't see what for you persuaded Nap to let you arrest Yandle," remarked Bill Holliday. "Of all the fool tricks! You can't prove a thing on him."

"I'm not tryin' to yet," said Buff. "I haven't any idea who killed the sheriff. It may have been Yandle, or Caltrop, or any one of half a dozen men who were bad friends with Joe. Don't you see the real reason?" he pursued in reply to his cousin's glare of amazement. "The reason for arresting Yandle, I mean?"

"Not bein' half-witted, I don't!"

"My mistake," apologized Buff, snicking open a box of rifle cartridges and beginning to fill the loops in his belt. "The notion came to me while we were talking it over with Nap, and while I couldn't explain it to you then, I naturally thought you'd catch the idea right away. We—"

"We? Who's we?"

"You and I. Nap don't count. He'll believe what we leave lying around for him to believe. So we jug Yandle, and make a hullabaloo how we've caught the criminal, and it's all over but the hanging. Don't you see, with the three of us swinging and rattling with Yandle, how much more of a chance we'll have to land the real criminal? If he thinks Pencil is taking his place, he's not going to pull out. Not he! Stay right around the neighborhood, he will. That's where we'll come in; or, if the murderer turns out to be Yandle, we've won already."

"It takes you to tell it! How long do you expect to keep Yandle in jail? Unless you can present real evidence, he'll get out on a writ of habeas corpus. He's sent for some slick Marysville attorney already."

Buff nodded.

"I know all that; but I've seen Dolan. He'll delay proceedings all he can."

"What did you tell him, for Gawd's sake?"

"No more'n I had to. The judge is all right. He thinks Nap's a fool, too." Buff buckled on the filled belt and drew his six-shooter. "We'll have to work awful fast," he continued, removing the cylinder and squinting through the barrel. "After what's happened, those boys will sure try to make some of us hard to find!"

"If you think so, it seems to me you're taking it mighty easy. They may pounce down on the Fair place any time," grumbled Bill, who, concerned for the welfare of his Jemima, was worrying worse than a roped calf.

Buff, who was not telling any one about Jack Fair, maintained a discreet silence.

"A lot you seem to care about what happens to those girls and their ma and pa!" Bill nagged on. "I made up my mind this morning that I'd just run out there this afternoon."

"Mother's little helper!" observed Buff, in his maddening drawl. "I'll — uh — go with you. My Buster horse needs exercise. I—"

The office door flew open and banged against the wall. In rushed Nap Tobias, his three chins quivering with suppressed excitement, his eyes protruding like a frog's.

"Boys," cried the chief deputy, "the agent just now sent word that the Twisted Foot got Jack Cobway yesterday, ten miles south of Indian Ridge. The stage brought in the body. He says that Jack was carrying ten thousand dollars to Paradise Bend. Come on!"

It was then that remembrance came to Buff Warren.

XXX

THE two deputies followed Nap to where Jack Cobway's body lay. It had been carried from the stage into Calloway's store and laid on the long counter. Thither folk followed and crowded and gazed with the morbid curiosity that most people have in such a tragedy.

When the three officers of the law entered, Calloway was complaining bitterly to Whisky Jim and the agent of the stage company anent the deposit of the body in his place of business.

"I don't see," he fretted, "why you had to bring him in here! With him a lyin' there coverin' most of the counter, customers won't buy. They spend their time gawpin' at him, and that's all they do spend. I'm losing money every minute those remainders stay in the place. You had a right to take him to the station!"

"Now, Cal," said the agent placatingly, "you know we ain't got any nice long counter like you have. There's only the floor, and that's mostly covered with an express consignment I can't put outside. Anyway, didn't I try to put him in Lil Fernie's sitting room, where there's a long table and lots o' room for the jury? She wouldn't let me, 'count of house cleaning, and she spoke of your place. I'm asking you, what else could I do after that? Besides, you're the postmaster, a government officer like, almost as good as an undertaker."

"Is that so?" snapped the nettled Calloway. "You get him out of here! You found him. He's your corpse!"

"He'll have to stay here till the coroner sits on him, Cal," said Nap Tobias importantly, thus settling the difficulty.

The chief deputy had recovered the accustomed poise of his build and weight. He began putting official questions to Whisky Jim, the stage driver, and the finder of the dead man.

Boiled down to essentials—for a prolix man was Whisky Jim—he had discovered the body lying on its face in the bottom of a wash ten miles south of Indian Ridge. There was a bullet hole, as the deputy could see for himself, squarely between the eyes. Yes, Jack had got his gun out, but the weapon had not been fired. Here it was.

Jack's horse was not in sight—wandered off, likely. Beside the body were the peculiar misshapen sole marks of the Twisted Foot, also the customary cigarette butt of the characteristic black tobacco and saddle-blanket paper.

Had Whisky Jim searched the vicinity? He had not. This with some emphasis. He had loaded the body into the stage—there were no passengers that trip—and had driven on. Yes, he had heard before leaving Marysville that Jack Cobway had started the day before for Paradise Bend, with ten thousand dollars in his poke.

This was the extent of the information to be obtained from Whisky Jim. It was enough for Nap Tobias.

"Boys," said he to his two deputies, "get your horses. I'll get a posse together. We're going down there right away."

As they passed out, Buff heard one woman say to another:

"Kind of mean of Lil Fernie not to let 'em put the poor feller in her sitting room—nice large room like that, where everybody could see and listen. House cleaning, indeed!"

A sniff from the other woman.

"She house cleaned last week. I saw her. She—"

Buff didn't catch the tail of the remark. He was hurrying along the street, with Bill Holliday, after Nap Tobias.

"Nap," said he, when he had caught up with his chief, "what say Bill and I ride ahead to where Jack's body was found and look over the ground before the posse gets there?"

"That ain't necessary," declared Nap. "We'll all go together."

"Better let us two try it," persisted Buff, with a sunny smile. "You know posses always bull around, and in a case like this, where we don't want to overlook anything, they're likely to destroy more evidence than they'll find. This is a case for two or three men."

"You think so?" returned Nap. "Well, that's all right, too. I guess I'll have me a posse just the same, and you and Bill can go along with us."

Buff gave it up.

"Bill," said Buff, when they had saddled their mounts and were waiting at the sheriff's corral for Nap Tobias, "do you remember getting drunk after that horse race, and finishing it out in that bunch of cottonwoods a quarter mile back of the stage company's corral?"

"I remember that's where I woke up," was the guarded reply.

"Yes. Well, while I was trying to get you to sober up, I found a note in a crack at the base of the biggest cottonwood. Near as I can remember, she went like this:

> "Hear that J. C. Marysville is taking ten thousand head of steers to Paradise Bend on the 18th.

"I never gave it a second thought till today," continued Buff. "Jack Cobway of Marysville, carrying ten thousand *dollars*, left that town for Paradise Bend day before yesterday — the 18th. See anything now?"

Bill drew a long breath.

"I see the Twisted Foot ain't working alone!"

"You bet he ain't! But this ain't all. That note in the cottonwood was signed with a figure 2."

"Was the writing the same?" Bill asked eagerly.

"It was printed, like the one in the stove and the one under the heifer's horn; but I seem to remember it had the same kind of sidehill A's and T's. I can't be sure, but anyhow the '2' is enough to connect it with the one we found in the stove, and the printing of that connects it with the one under the heifer's horn. It's a long rope, but the loop is on the Twisted Foot!"

Bill went pale, then red.

"If he harms any one of that family—" he began in a thick voice.

"It means we'll have to work faster," cut in Buff. "Piper and that outfit are one thing, but the Twisted Foot is another breed of cat. If he's after them, we've got to get him, and get him quick!"

"But what's he got against them?" demanded Bill, talking to keep his courage up, for he was in a sad state of fright—not for himself, but for his Jemima and her family. "They ain't got any money. If he scared 'em off, their ranch wouldn't do him any good. It don't sound reasonable to think Caltrop has hired him to do that job."

"There are several slants to this deal that don't sound reasonable. The Fairs are too small for the Twisted Foot to pick at in the way of trade; and even if Caltrop had hired him to do the job, which is unreasonable, the Twisted Foot wouldn't be likely to write warnings. Yet that's what he has done—he's had a warning written for him, I mean. He kills the sheriff—the note in the stove cinches that—and turns the prisoners loose."

"And it ain't reasonable to suppose all that outfit of loose tongues are side kickers of his," puzzled Bill.

"No—only one of 'em is. He let the rest out for a blind. Only one, and that one's a fellah I'd never pick for a partner in crime." Now was obviously the moment to acquaint Bill with what he knew of Tresawna. "I mean Andy Tresawna," concluded Buff.

"That tinhorn! How do you know?"

Buff told him how he knew.

"Seems to me you've kept it to yourself a long time!"

"I wasn't sure," Buff declared smoothly. "A fellah can't go round ruining reputations till he *is* sure. You wouldn't want to yourself."

"First I knew Andy ever had a reputation to ruin. Next time you know anything like that, tell me. I don't like working in the dark."

"Next time I sure will," Buff told him heartily. "Got any notion who No. 2 is, the Farewell citizen who wrote the notes?"

"I haven't," said Bill gruffly, for he was still feeling resentful at not being sooner admitted to the full confidence of his cousin. "One thing, it ain't Tresawna."

"Go to the head of the class. You're sure bright to guess that!"

"Don't talk to me about being bright," snarled Bill. "You're the fellah thought Caltrop was behind that business over at the Fairs', when it was the Twisted Foot all the time. You—leggo my arm!"

But Buff did not immediately release his grasp.

"It just struck me," said he in a low, tense tone, "that at the time that steer buyer from Piegan was killed by the Twisted Foot, Caltrop was away from the ranch. Three men in all were killed and robbed while you and I worked for the Eighty-Eight. Near as I can recollect, on the dates those men were killed Caltrop was not at the ranch."

Bill forgot the clutching fingers on his arm.

"It can't be Caltrop."

Yet the denial was not convincing, even to himself.

"If Caltrop wasn't home last night," said Buff, "it makes a healthy string of coincidences. A man has been hung for less."

"Caltrop's right foot ain't twisted."

"He'll have the chance to explain why it ain't," said Buff grimly, "if he wasn't home last night. One of us will ride out there soon as we can get away from Nap."

"It ain't necessary," said Bill. "I saw Lonzo Peters ride in a while ago."

Leaving Bill with the horses, Buff picked out the saloon in front of which an Eighty-Eight horse was tied, and entered. The bold Alonzo was draped against the bar in the most approved attitude. He greeted Buff with affection, for he was more than half drunk already. Buff must drink with him. Buff did.

"Sam home?" queried Buff, across the bottle.

"Went to Piegan two days ago," replied Alonzo, whose diction, no matter how much he drank, never became slurred. "Be back day after to-morrow."

Having gained the necessary information, Buff tore himself away from Alonzo, who was loath to let him go, and returned to Bill.

"He's in Piegan City, according to Lonzo," he told Bill. "We'll wait on him day after to-morrow, and find out what his business was in Piegan."

"If we can hang it on him—"

"We'll have to do it before those two weeks he gave the Fairs are up. If Sam is the Twisted Foot, he won't stop for threats of yours or mine, or anybody else's!"

Bill swore under his breath. Buff was silent. His was the stouter spirit, yet his heart was in his boots. For, knowing what he did of the inhuman acts of the Twisted Foot, it was quite on the cards that the man would not wait until the two weeks were up.

If he and Bill struck a wrong scent, Jack Fair would prove but a makeshift buckler between his family and such a monster. Decidedly there was need of haste. As if in response to his desire, at that moment Nap Tobias arrived with a posse of ten men.

"Do you think there'll be enough of us?" Buff asked Nap, with seeming anxiety, as they moved out of town. "Remember, he may be armed or something."

"Of course he's armed," said Nap, who had no humor in his composition. "Why wouldn't he be? But he won't be hanging around there, anyway. Do you think he will?"

There was nothing simulated about the concern in Nap's tone and expression. Buff appreciated this to the full, and spoke as impish impulse bade him.

"You never can tell whether he'll be hanging around or not. It might just strike him that we look like leading citizens —moneyed men."

Nap glanced over his shoulder at his jingling followers. Bill began to cough rapidly. Apparently his sore throat was no better.

"I don't see—" Nap began.

"I knew you'd see it right away," interrupted Buff, behind whose first impulse a real plan had begun to take shape, "how several of the posse look like distinguished folks, and they are, too. Here"—he lowered his voice—"are three of our foremost saloonkeepers, the owner of the dance hall, and a prominent cattleman, to say nothing of several other local celebrities. Now I ask you, Nap, what more could the Twisted Foot ask than a shot—several shots, the full of his magazine—at such an outfit? It would add to his reputation, and mighty nigh put a crimp in Farewell. We haven't got so many successful business men here that we can afford to scatter them by the wayside."

Nap looked at his assistant in some muddlement of mind. He had never realized before that business men were of such value to a community. That aspect of the situation had not occurred to him when he asked them to become possemen. It had seemed to him that a posse was necessary, and that good men were to be desired; yet there was logic in what Buff said. He saw that now, especially—

"You'll be needing their votes, too," Buff was hastening on, "when you're elected sheriff next November."

"I don't know that I'll run," murmured the flattered Tobias, who, since Joe Mack's death, fully intended to become the next incumbent if such a thing were humanly possible.

"Of course you'll run," asseverated Buff, casting a glance of cold contempt at Bill, who was coughing himself purple in the face. "Everybody says so now; but what will happen if"—he was supremely thankful that no one but Bill could hear a word he said—"you get a bunch of 'em perforated? They won't like it, those that live to tell the tale. Their families won't like it, either—especially those whose heads don't live to tell the tale. You'll lose votes—sure to. And if a popular man like Piney Jackson—not that you ain't as popular as a demijohn at a house raisin' yourself, Nap—like Piney, I say, runs against you, you might just get nosed out. You wouldn't want that to happen, would you?"

Nap was discovering more and more logic in the words of Buff Warren. That he himself should not be elected sheriff was unthinkable. He couldn't afford to run any risks.

"Of course," he said slowly, carefully picking his words, "I don't want to get any of my friends shot. It wouldn't be fair to them. I don't care nothin' about myself, y' understand"—to do him justice there was a measure of truth in the last statement—"and naturally, when I swore 'em in, I didn't think much about them, either. We've got to make a showing, though. We can't let the Twisted Foot kill a man right in our own county and not do *somethin'* about it."

He paused and scratched a stubby chin.

"How would it be if Bill and I went on ahead?" suggested Buff, quite as if this was his first mention of the scheme. "We'd draw fire, if the Twisted Foot is hanging around, and get him located, so that when the rest of you come up we'll know just where he is. Then all we'll have to do is take him into camp; but if we go in blind and all together, thisaway, it's a heap likely there'll be some familiar faces missing from the home circles this evening!"

The plan twanged the strings of memory in the mind of the chief deputy; but its irrefutable logic muffled the twang.

"I don't much like the idea of your going in alone, Buff," said he. "I'd like to go with you."

"Somebody has to lead the posse," pointed out Buff. "You're a lot better fitted for that than either Bill or me—or anybody else, for that matter."

This was spreading it very thickly, but the chief deputy absorbed it like a thirsty sponge.

"Go ahead!" said he.

XXXI

In the meantime three of the five prisoners were spurring southward. Tresawna, leaving the others at the crossing of the Lazy to ride his own line, took Hilario Chavez with him. He thought it wise to separate in order to make their escape more certain.

Bushong, Piper, and Kergow gave their leg-weary mounts no rest until they had put sixty long miles between them and the Lazy. Even then they would not have halted had they not, in the tricky light of early dawn, some thirty hours after their escape, ridden plump into the camp of Captain Benjamin Burr, the Southern gentleman who peddled tinware for a living.

The surprise was mutual. Captain Burr, who was on his hands and knees rekindling his fire, in preparation for breakfast, made a dive for his Spencer seven-shooter when he recognized the trio; but he did not reach the gun, where it hung in its bucket from a wagon bow. He halted halfway, with his biceps cuddling his ears.

"That's better," Piper said calmly. "Your brains will be all over your shirt if you make another step!"

Piper and his two friends dismounted without losing the magic of the drop for an instant. Their faces were drawn with fatigue. Their horses stood with hanging heads and dropped ears.

"Ah unde'stood yo' were safe in jail," said the captain, while Piper was searching him.

"We're just as safe outside of it," grinned Piper, delving into his captive's right bootleg. "Don't you keep anything in here besides your plug?"

"Only mah leg," was the dry reply.

Piper laughed—he was a humorous devil, in a way.

"Just for that, now, we'll let you eat breakfast with us—after you've cooked it. We ate our last meal yesterday noon."

"Ah guessed as much, judging by the way yo' friends are gobblin' mah ha'dtack. Say, they ain't any such need of throwin' those new pans on the ground, is they?"

"You go to hell, you damned ol' Johnny Reb!" Kergow made pleasant response. "You'll be lucky if we don't throw *you* on the ground and tromp on you. Get a wiggle on with that fire! Do you think we want to wait till hell freezes for that coffee to boil?"

"If Ah only had mah gun!" lamented the captain.

"But you ain't," pointed out Piper. "I've got it. There's your fire. Hop to it now!"

"Did you find anything on him?" queried Bushong.

"Not a—here, old man, where do you keep all the dinero you cheat the ranchers out of?"

"Ah bank it."

"Sure you do!" said Piper shrewdly. "I mean what you haven't had time to bank—what you've been taking in on this trip."

"I've just started out. I haven't sold—"

"There's his ax, George." Piper nodded to Bushong. "I guess we'll have to chop his wagon to pieces. He's too damned stubborn!"

Bushong had no more than laid the palm of his hand on the ax handle when the captain said sullenly:

"You'll find my poke under the axle grease in the wagon box."

Piper reached the wagon box first. He lifted the lid and thrust in a hand. Pulling out a stout leather bag, he dangled it triumphantly.

"Ain't he the old liar, tryin' to skin us out of our hard-earned cash?"

The other two crowded in as he loosened the draw strings.

It was at this supposedly opportune juncture that the captain streaked for the woods; but his captors were as alert as weasels. They caught him and tripped him up before he reached the first tree. They dragged him roughly to his feet, and frog marched him back to camp. Tex Piper, with a kick and a shove, sent him reeling toward the fire.

"Hustle, now!" was Piper's succinct command.

Captain Burr scrambled to his feet, his old eyes ablaze, his hands balled into fists. Piper, entrenched behind his six-shooter, laughed at him.

"Old man, you're travelin' the right way to get shot!"

Captain Burr evidently believed it, for he turned suddenly to the fire and fell to work.

After breakfast, while the three intruders sat picking their teeth, and Captain Burr was eating the meager leavings, Bushong sighed deeply.

"If I only had one small drink, I'd feel like I'd made a meal!" he said.

An observant man would have noticed the tiny spasm that twitched the features of Captain Burr, but the trio, the bright eye of caution dulled by stomachs replete with bacon, bread, beans, and coffee, were momentarily not observant.

"Old man, you got any whisky?" demanded Piper.

"Nun-no!" stuttered Captain Burr.

Piper got to his feet.

"You don't say it like you mean it. Maybe I better reason with you."

He strode across to the captain. Taking the tin peddler's ear between thumb and bent forefinger, he drew him to his feet.

"You got any red-eye?" he bellowed. "You got a bottle hid somewheres! Fork over!"

The captain hesitated no longer.

"The whisky's under the wagon seat, wrapped in the extra blanket."

Bushong climbed up on the doubletree and leaned over the seat. Within thirty seconds he was on the ground, with a quart bottle in his hand.

"It's full!" he announced joyously.

Piper twirled the captain around and kicked him so hard that he shot over the fire and fell in a heap.

"That's what you get for being selfish! A whole quart of whisky, and you wanted it all for yourself! Come back here! Sit down right here between George and me while we're having our little nip."

Sulkily the captain obeyed. On his usually expressive countenance there was no expression whatever; but his dangerous old eyes were glittering.

The cork was drawn. The bottle passed.

"Your friend Buff Warren thinks he's mighty smart," said Piper, wiping his chin with the back of a hairy hand; "but we're smarter. When this thing blows over, we're coming back, and we'll make Mr. Buff hard to find—and anybody else that gets in our way!"

"We'd ought to rub out the captain before we leave," offered Kergow. "He'll set the officers on our track."

"Ah wouldn't do that," proffered the captain. "Ah won't set anybody on yo' track. Not I!"

"Shut up!" ordered Piper, giving him a backhand blow across the mouth. "We're not asking you to promise anything. We don't need to!"

A cold smile accompanied these words. The captain lowered his eyelids, to conceal the blazing expectation that he feared his eyes were proclaiming.

The bottle continued on its merry way. It had made perhaps four rounds of the captain's unwelcome guests when Piper put his hand to his head.

"I feel sleepy," he muttered. "My head aches, too."

"Tha's funny," chimed in Bushong. "I feel sleepy m'self. I—"

"So do I," said Kergow. "Pass bottle!"

Piper set his lips to the bottle neck, took a sound and healthy pull, and obeyed. Kergow tilted the bottle skyward.

"Don't drink it all!" cautioned Bushong.

Kergow handed him the bottle with a peculiarly wavering arm. Bushong drank gulpingly. The bottle was still at his lips when Piper, without a word, slumped sidewise to the ground, where he lay breathing stertorously.

Captain Burr, a most unholy light glittering in his eyes, gathered his legs under him. Kergow, his chin sunk on his breast, was muttering unintelligibly. Bushong lowered the bottle, gazed into vacancy for a moment, then closed his eyes and leaned against Kergow. Overbalanced, the latter fell sidewise even as Piper had done, and, his cheek pillowed on the grass, began to snore. Bushong, his nose crushed against his comrade's cartridge belt, his mouth wide open, was already fast asleep.

Captain Burr arose swiftly, rescued the bottle, and corked it with an air of great satisfaction. He eyed the sleepers with his head on one side.

"Kick me, will you? Slap mah face,

you scoundrel! Ah'll show you! They's just enough of those extra breechin' straps to go around!"

XXXII

THE wash, a floor of gray-blue gravel and red sand between cut banks, lay sizzling in the summer sun when Buff and Bill went down into it on foot. They had left their horses at a little distance, so that no mark or track might be padded out by their hoofs.

At the point where the wagon road crossed it, the floor of the wash was more sand than gravel, and they had no difficulty in finding the place where Jack Cobway had been shot.

" Here's the track of the Twisted Foot," pointed out Bill. " What say we ride straight to the Eighty-Eight and try our luck?"

" I think we'd better look around here first," said Buff.

They began to quarter the ground like hounds in covert.

" Guess he only dropped one butt," said Bill, alluding to the lone cigarette butt that Whisky Jim had brought in and given to Nap Tobias.

" Guess so. Over yonder looks a likely place for a bushwhacker."

They diagonaled across the wash to the likely place, a notch on the edge of the cut bank between two bowlders; but just behind it they discovered a colony of ant hills. These showed no sign of having been recently disturbed — even if it were not enough that no man can lie among ant hills for any appreciable length of time.

The two deputies continued their search. At the end of twenty minutes Buff called across to Bill, where he was working the opposite side of the wash:

" I've found it!"

Bill trotted across and gazed upon the crushed grasses behind a sumac. Buff stooped and retrieved a cartridge case. He compared it with others, which he produced from a pocket.

" Same as the ones I picked up on Packsaddle," he told Bill.

He stepped back and began to scan the ground for tracks. Thirty feet from the sumac he stopped and stared. Then he dropped to his knees, his eyes narrowed to slits.

" Look here, Bill!"

Bill looked and saw trodden grass blades slowly rising. Bill, too, dropped to his knees and looked hither and yon.

" He couldn't have come back!" he said.

Buff's arm shot out. From among the grass stems his fingers plucked a cigarette butt precisely similar to the one found by Whisky Jim. Now the grass was not in the least damp, yet the cigarette butt was wet at one end.

" Couldn't he have come back?" said Buff in a harsh whisper, handing the butt to Bill. " Feel that! The ash is warm, too."

He drew his six-shooter, deeply regretting that he had left his Winchester on his saddle. Bill drew his gun, and crouched a trifle lower.

" When I gave Nap that fairy tale about the Twisted Foot hanging around for a shot at the posse," drawled Buff in a musing tone, " I had no idea I was telling the truth!"

" Neither had I," said Bill.

" I think—" began Buff.

A rifle spoke at a distance. Something snatched his hat from his head. He and his relative sprang apart with consummate dispatch. In three leaps both were in the wash, under the cut bank.

Buff, who had managed, in passing, to pick up his hat, lightly touched with a finger tip a hole in the crown.

" Good line, but high," he said, and donned the hat. " I never knew Caltrop could shoot as close as that!"

" What was that you were starting to think about, when that feller put in his period?" Bill asked with extreme solicitude.

" Never mind," was the reply. " We did it. Seems to me he fired twice more while we were on our way."

" Three times," corrected Bill. " One of 'em tore my shirt." He indicated a fresh cut in his loose sleeve. " He was shooting from that little stand of timber over south a ways."

" I saw — range about four hundred yards," said Buff, who had already holstered his six-shooter. " Tell you what, Billyum—you stick right here and shoot at him over this cut bank. If you draw a coarse sight, maybe your gun will carry halfway. It 'll give you something to do while I go for the rifles."

" Like hell it will!" snarled Billyum, hastening after the rapidly retreating Buff. " What's your hurry, anyway? Anybody would think you were afraid of this feller."

"I am," was the ready reply. "Do you know where you'd be if you was as scared as I am? You'd be half way back to town. Here's a good place to climb over the bank—under this jack pine. Upsy daisy!"

"Is it a good place?" asked Bill breathlessly, as a bullet smacked the trunk of the jack pine in question and showered pine needles down the backs of their necks. "You get any more bright thoughts like that, and I'll sure have to bury you!"

"That was close," admitted Buff, looking cautiously around the corner of a rock toward the stand of timber whence the shots had come; "but I got you over the bank all right, didn't I? You stick by your Uncle Buffy, young fellah, and you'll wear diamonds!"

"You mean wings," Bill declared. "I can feel 'em sprouting already. While we're talking about it, damn my Uncle Buffy!"

"Them's harsh words, Algernon. You watch me close, now and I'll give you a first-class imitation of a young fellah wriggling backward at four miles an hour on his stomach. Count them—four miles!"

So saying, Buff proceeded backward along a shallow depression in the ground until he came to a slight rise. Over this he rolled very quickly. The bushwhacker's rifle cracked twice as Bill followed Buff so closely that the hard toe of his boot turned Buff's funny bone into an almost total loss.

"Did I kick you?" Bill inquired with mock solicitude.

"Not at all," replied Buff, hugging his elbow. "Did he miss you?"

"Complete."

"I'm sorry. Look over the top, Bill, and make a face at him. Maybe he'll shoot again."

But Bill, crouching, was making the best of his way toward the tethered horses. Buff stuck his hat on the end of a stick, held out the stick horizontally, and slowly pushed it up over the rim of the rise, while he raised a cautious head and parted the grass blades in front of his eyes with even more cautious fingers.

Almost immediately he fell back, his eyes filled with dirt.

"He sure is one old hand!" he murmured, picking up his fallen hat, and retreating in the direction of Bill and the horses. "Hat didn't fool him a mite."

"What's the matter, Buff?" inquired Bill, when his cousin joined him. "Did he throw sand in your eyes, or something? I'd rub 'em real hard, I would. Bound to do 'em a heap of good. Try standing on one leg, holding down your eyelids, and blowing your nose."

"If we ride down this draw," said Buff coldly, "maybe we can work in behind him and head him toward the posse. They can't be more than five miles back by this time."

They rode along the draw and debouched upon a small flat, on whose surface the wash sprayed out into a fan of gravel and sand. This open space they crossed at a lope, entered another draw, and came out finally among the pines, below a knoll with a serrated comb of black limestone rimming its top. They knew that the knoll would give them a view of the rear of the bushwhacker's stand of timber. Accordingly they left their horses among the pines and clattered up the side of the knoll on foot.

When they had reached the top, and had stuck their heads over the limestone outcrop, they beheld a man on a black horse shoot out of the timber and head westward at speed. The range was nearly half a mile. They did not fire. They ran back to their mounts, and rode hard to cut him off on the flat.

Bill was moved to curse the luck.

"If I'd only stayed in that flat, we'd get him sure!"

"Cheer up!" cried Buff. "We'll get him anyway. Ain't I riding Buster?"

Gradually he drew away from Bill, and by the time the draw gave place to the flat he was fifty yards in advance. Even so the black was disappearing in a swag between two low hills on the other side of the flat. The bushwhacker had made the crossing safely.

Buff swung Buster in pursuit, and spurred vigorously. It galled him to admit it, but it certainly seemed as if the bushwhacker's black horse had the legs of Buster.

It did not sweeten Buff's vinegar, on reaching the swag where the black had disappeared, to find open country beyond, and no sign of the fleeing outlaw. There were no tracks to be made out from the saddle, for the ground was stony. Buff dismounted for a closer investigation.

Along came Bill Holliday and swung down beside his cousin.

"Looks like he outrun you and then swallowed his tracks," suggested the irrepressible Bill, with a demure grin. "If it's Sam, he's brighter than we thought!"

"Shut up!" snarled Buff. "Buster was tired."

"That's what they all say after a horse race—except the winner. Never mind! Keep right on looking for those tracks you lost. I'll help you. I—"

"This way!" exclaimed Buff, and mounted Buster with a rush.

He had found the mark of a shod hoof pointing south. This meant that the pursued had turned at a right angle to his former line, his new point probably being the broken country west of the Bar S.

The two men galloped along the base of a low hill. Here were a spring, a brook, and soft ground, and here the rider of the black horse had turned eastward for two hundred yards before again heading to the south.

"No wonder we didn't see him!" grieved Bill. "While we were fiddling around, hunting for his tracks, he was traveling lickety larrup with the hill between us. Bet he's got five mile start!"

"Split the difference," Buff told him. "He's heading for the Bar S breaks. We'll catch him there."

"Ain't you the optimist?" Bill remarked. "Just take a look at this country right here—the best kind of cover! I tell you flat, Buff, this Twisted Foot person is cooking up a surprise party for us right now!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when there sounded a cracking report, and a windfall two hundred yards dead ahead spurted a cloud of smoke. Bill's horse fell on his knees, turned a somersault, and sent Bill flying through the air, to land with a sickening thud under a small cedar.

Buff, snatching at the rifle under his leg, jerked his horse to the right where broken ground promised cover. Four times before he gained shelter did the rifle speak from the fallen tree. Twice was his cantle bored, a bullet scraped his forehead, and another seared Buster's rump, thereby rendering that faithful beast well-nigh unmanageable.

No sooner had Buff reached the comparatively safe cover of the broken ground, secured the frantic Buster to the first tree he could find, and bound his neckerchief around his own wounded head, than he set about replying to the defiance of the Twisted Foot. He flopped down at the right-hand corner of the bowlder and thrust forth the barrel of his cocked rifle.

Phut-bang! Again the distant windfall wreathed itself in smoke; but no chip flew from either the bowlder behind which Buff lay or any of the near-by rocks. Buff supposed that the bandit must have shot over by several feet, and fired at the lower edge of the other's smoke—without result, for the bushwhacker fired again and yet again.

Still no bullet stopped in Buff's vicinity. Not until the enemy's fourth shot did he realize that the bushwhacker was firing at the fallen Bill.

Instantly, without stopping to consider the risk involved, Buff scrambled to his feet and raced toward the form huddled under the cedar.

Three messengers of death twanged past him as he ran. He did not hear them. The windfall banked itself in smoke. He did not see it. All his faculties were focused on his cousin. He reached the little cedar, scooped up the inert body in his muscular arms, and started at a staggering run—for Bill was a large-boned piece of humanity—toward the rocks he had just quitted.

The gentleman behind the fallen tree did not cease his attentions. Whether it was his off day, or whether his aim suffered from overanxiety, one cannot say with certainty, but Buff reached the rocks without the hidden shooter having scored a direct hit. A bullet, however, had snipped off the lobe of Bill's left ear. Buff was glad to see how freely the wound bled, thereby proclaiming that Bill still lived.

Buff laid the still unconscious man behind the bowlder next to his. A hasty examination revealed that Bill's heart was beating regularly, and that apparently his only hurts were a large bump on the top of his head, a pair of skinned hands, and the aforementioned wounded ear.

"I guess you'll do," he said with satisfaction, and betook himself to his rifle.

He and the gentleman behind the windfall began exchanging shots. Again Buff wished for a saddle gun. The rifle had too much barrel.

"Out of my first pay, I'll get me one," he muttered, squeezing the trigger.

He felt a tug at his heel. He drew back and turned his head. It was Bill, recovered, and very cross.

"What did I tell you about that surprise?" demanded Bill.

"It does look that way," admitted Buff, glancing at Bill's ear.

"Is that the best you can do?" sneered the savage Bill. "'It looks that way,' the man says! I warn you what's going to happen, and do you take my advice? You don't! You bull right along regardless!"

"Well, you see, Bill," Buff said apologetically, "I was just going to say that maybe we'd better slide off to the west a ways, when *pow*, he fired, and everything happened at once."

"And it all happened to me—me! Do you get damaged? Only a small little scratch on your forehead—leastwise, I suppose that's why you got your head tied up; but more to call attention to it than anything else, I'll bet. Folks will take notice, and ask questions, and call you a hero. A hero? Look at *me!* Bump on my head big as my two fists, and I ache all over. I'll bet I've busted a leg, or an arm, or something!"

"I don't think so," denied Buff. "Far as I can see, you only lost the flap off your left ear."

"What?" cried the anguished Bill, and made sure with a thumb and forefinger that Buff was telling the truth. "When did this happen? It did? I didn't even feel it when I came to," he added resentfully.

"Numb, I guess."

"It ain't numb now, darn it! Maybe I'll lose the hearing in that ear!"

"What do you care? It will give you something else to blame me for."

"And you bet I'll blame you! Where's my hat?"

"I expect it's still over there under the cedar. It must have dropped off when I picked you up."

"Well, you had a right to bring it along. Suppose I get sunstroke? This sun's powerful hot. I'm beginning to feel sort of funny right now. Tell you flat, Buff, you've made a fine tangle of this deal. If I'd been running things, this would never have happened."

"Is that so?" said Buff, who had again lined his sights on the bushwhacker's windfall. "You think you're a real walking, talking he-wonder with pink ears, and here's your chance to prove it. Crawl Buster, and find the posse. You're no good here with only a six-shooter. How could I get your rifle? Your horse is lying on it the widest way. If you ride straight north a couple of hundred yards before you head east, he won't be able to see you."

"Trying to get me rubbed out—I can see that!" complained the pessimist. "As if I hadn't known enough misery in my short life! Don't you move, now, till papa comes back!"

Bill contrived to ride away without being fired on, and Buff settled down to the business in hand.

Holliday had not been gone a quarter of an hour when firing from the windfall ceased. Buff suspected a ruse. He tried all the trapper tricks he knew for drawing fire, but without result. Had the bushwhacker gone?

Taking advantage of every bit of possible cover, he followed a circuitous route that would lead him to a position within forty yards of the rear of the windfall. There were open spots to be crossed—places where his enemy, if watchful, could annihilate him. Before traversing the first dangerous place, Buff waited a good five minutes. Then, crouching, he squattered across with a rush.

The bushwhacker's rifle cracked like a whip. Buff felt a burning pain in the upper part of his right arm, and pitched headlong behind the low break for which he was heading.

He sat up, laid his rifle across his knees, and ripped his right sleeve to the shoulder. Judging from the pain, he had expected to view at least a hole bored through the arm, but it was nothing more than a deep graze. He tore off the sleeve, and, with the help of his teeth, made a left-handed bandage.

When this was adjusted, the wound smarted more than ever. The blood soaking into the bandage was so much liquid fire. He wished that Bill would hurry back. Thirst assailed him. The sun rode high in a sky of brass, and sent down its heat to add to his misery.

Across the shimmering landscape heat waves flickered and a dust devil whirled solemnly. Peering between two horizontal branches of a wild currant bush, Buff took occasion to look at the windfall. Its shape was distorted, alien. Even as he stared, it slowly swelled to twice its size, then shrank and swelled again. The face of the land about him tilted, and objects on its surface assumed strange forms. A sumac in the middle distance became a tree, a grove of trees, a tree again, vanished.

A numbness stole into the lower half of his legs. It began to seep throughout his body, with the exception of the wounded arm and head. His brain was curiously dull; yet, despite his lethargy, he realized what was the matter with him. He had, ere this, seen wounded men seized by delirium.

"That graze must be deeper than it looks," he muttered. "I'll go off my head in a while. Wish I had a drink!"

There was no water to be had, and there remained the problem of the bushwhacker. On hands and knees, dragging his rifle, Buff began to crawl forward. Despite his throbbing head and burning arm, his dulled and rocking brain, the will of the man forced his reluctant body onward. Instinctively he maintained the vigilance that was his safeguard.

He came at last to a place where the break made a long hairpin turn to the southwest before resuming its southward trend. From the rocks where he had first taken refuge he had not seen this hairpin of high ground. If he had, he would have gone another way.

To follow the line of the break would consume much valuable time. To cross the hairpin would be about the worth of a man's life. Although the tall, gray green spears of grass grew thickly above the line of the break, the growth was neither dense enough nor tall enough to conceal the passage of a man, no matter how close to the ground he crouched.

Buff took off his hat, raised his head, and peered across at the windfall. He was nearer to it than he had believed. It was not more than a hundred yards away. He pushed his rifle out in front of him; but the sights refused to line up. He could not hold the barrel steady. If he could only get a little closer—within practical revolver range! He laid down the rifle and drew his six-shooter.

Behind that windfall was the man who was persecuting the Fair family. It must be said that in Buff's mind this fact quite overshadowed any other crime of which the desperado was guilty.

Why didn't Bill hurry back with the posse? If the posse didn't hurry up, it would be too late. The Twisted Foot would be gone. Indeed, perhaps he had already gone.

Buff's head sank upon his breast as he pondered this contingency. Then he lifted his eyes, and discovered that he was the hub of a slowly revolving wheel of scenery. Earth, distant trees, nearer bushes—everything was moving.

He twisted his body over on his knees and sat back on his heels. He found that he could not raise his right arm. He swore feebly, and shifted his six-shooter to his left hand.

Over there, beyond those marching green blades, was the windfall—and the Twisted Foot, whom he believed to be identical with Sam Caltrop. He meant to kill the man. If he waited any longer, it would be too late. Although strange, irrelevant conceits were mingling themselves in wild confusion about the thought of the Twisted Foot, the latter was strong enough to dominate them all, so that not for a moment did Buff's dogged will flag in its determination to drive his distressed body to its objective.

"I've got to get him!" he muttered, and relinquished the comparatively safe plan of pushing on to a position in the rear of the windfall.

He stood upright on his numb and shaky legs. That he was not instantly shot down must have been due to a momentary lack of watchfulness on the part of his adversary. Dimly Buff comprehended that the quicker he crossed the open ground, the longer he would live. He started forward at a staggering run which, in spite of its lumbering awkwardness, carried him toward his goal at amazing speed.

He was within forty yards of the windfall before the bushwhacker's rifle spat flame and smoke in his face. Buff fired back, and ran on. The bandit fired again. So did he; yet he heard no sound. He seemed to be moving in the midst of a great silence, a silence that clogged his footsteps and oppressed him with a tangible weight. Still he ran on while the rifle sped lead at him as fast as its owner could work the lever and pull the trigger. After the first shots Buff did not fire. He knew that he must reserve his ammunition for close quarters. Buff was not more than ten yards from the blowdown, when the bandit, a blue bandanna completely masking his face, dropped his empty rifle, sprang to his feet, and flashed out his six-shooter.

Buff, mad as the veriest bedlamite in his delirium, threw down on the figure that loomed so indistinctly in the mixture of powder smoke that obscured his vision and fog that clouded his burning brain, threw down and shot and shot until the firing pin clicked and clicked on exploded primers.

The dim shape of the man at whom he had been firing receded into the mist. Buff, obsessed by the single thought of coming to grips with the Twisted Foot and tearing away the mask that concealed his features, reeled after the man. His six-shooter was empty, but he did not know this. He kept squeezing the trigger as if every pull meant a shot.

The whirling mists cleared a little. He saw the man more distinctly. His back, not his face. The man was running away. The Twisted Foot was escaping him. A wild cry of rage tore Buff's throat. He strove with shaking, futile fingers to eject the empty shells and reload the six-shooter. Naturally, in the condition he was in, the fingers of his left hand were all thumbs. He gave it up, and hurled the useless weapon at his enemy. He wished for another gun. He slapped his pockets as if he could conjure up another gun that way! Yet it was almost as if he did. For the palm of his hand struck something hard in the vest pocket — Tresawna's derringer! He extracted the ugly little weapon with the stubby twin barrels. He cocked it and fired twice at the man he was pursuing, the man who had untied a great black horse and was climbing into the saddle. It seemed to him that as he fired the second time, the man lost his hold on the horn and fell to the ground. The black horse reared and capered. But the man retained his hold on the bridle, retained his hold and pulled himself to his feet and into the saddle at last. And at a gallop he rode away.

Buff looked down at the smoking derringer in his left hand. He wondered stupidly why he had not thrown it at the man. He had thrown his six-shooter. He could have thrown the derringer. Suddenly he slumped to his knees and began to cry.

After a long, long time he heard voices. He strove to get on his feet. He found he could not. His eyes were shut. He could not open them. He seemed to be lying down, to be drifting somewhere. He let himself drift. He didn't care what happened to him now. Nothing mattered. The merciful darkness closed over him in an engulfing wave.

(*To be concluded in the June number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

AN INVITATION

COME forth and meet the spring,
And hear the birds
Set the old words
Of love to music as they flit and fling
Their songs among the happy opening flowers,
Building the while their nests in leafy bowers—
Ah, listen how they sing!

Come close, my love, to me!
'Tis kissing time,
All things agree;
Make haste to rime
Our mouths together
In measured music of our meeting kisses;
For surely all the world proclaims that this is
Love's weather!

Nuptials and vows
In all the budding boughs,
And hearts a mating—
Your heart to mine! Too long
I have been waiting;
How good, how good, with all the winter past,
To hold my love close to my heart at last!

Richard Leigh

The Grocer Earl

THE STORY OF A MAN WHO HAD MUCH TO LEARN

By Elizabeth Marc

A MAN who carried a shabby hand bag got out of a third-class carriage at the little station of Braithside. A moment later the train went on, leaving the passenger standing on the narrow pebbled platform.

"This is Braithside, isn't it?" he asked of a porter.

"Ain't you got eyes?" returned the porter, pointing to the name, picked out in stones, on the green bank.

That name was the porter's own handiwork, and he could not help being annoyed at the stupidity of this shabby, nervous-looking young man.

"All right," said the stranger. "I see now, of course. And could you direct me to Braithside Castle?"

"Why, you can see it, right up on the hill," demurred the porter. "You've only got to follow the road until you get to the gates; but if you're looking for a job there, you won't get it."

The stranger, who had already started in the direction indicated, stopped for further parley.

"Why shouldn't I get it?" he asked.

"Why, people is being turned off there every day!" the porter grinned. "Gatekeepers who've been there thirty years is gone. Place is to be run by a man and a boy, so they say. It comes mighty hard on some of them, that have been there all their lives."

"Perhaps," said the stranger gently, "it can't be helped."

"I'm not saying that it can, but there's a lot of talk," grumbled the porter. "Death duties—that's what it is. There's been three deaths one after another, and now the title's gone to a butcher, so they say."

"No, a grocer," said the other man.

"Oh, so you know about it, do you? Anyway, it's the grandson of a younger brother who ran away to Australia and changed his name. It's a terrible pity. He ain't rich, and he ain't a gentleman, and he ain't—"

"Perhaps," said the stranger, "before you go any further, I ought to tell you that I am he. But what you say is quite true. I am not rich, and I am not a gentleman, and it is a great pity."

And Hudson Hemsley, thirteenth Earl of Braithside, turned and walked slowly up the wide, white road.

II

On the way to the castle the new earl met a cart carrying a scanty load of shabby furniture. A man with drooping shoulders led the horse, and a red-eyed woman held the reins.

"The gatekeepers!" guessed the earl.

He went by with squared jaw and eyes that stared straight ahead; but a deep flush spread over his thin face.

A moment later he was passing through the archway under the gatehouse. The flagstones rang under his feet, and the gloom struck a chill. It could not have been cheerful, he thought, living in the gatehouse; yet that woman cried at leaving the place. Perhaps she had nowhere else to go. Perhaps some of her folk were buried here at Braithside.

In the doorway of the great castle, Sankey, the steward of Braithside, waited. The earl frowned. Why was this gray-haired man still here? His orders to the agent had been explicit.

"Dismiss everybody except caretakers," he had written.

The new earl walked up to the door somewhat defiantly. He had sent no warning of his coming; and after the reception at the station he expected to be asked what he wanted, or to be told to go around to the stable yard entrance.

But the old steward bowed.

"Good evening, my lord," he said, and quietly took the newcomer's bag. "We did not expect your lordship to-day," he added.

"And I," returned Braithside, with the brutality of the kindly, timid man who goads himself to a show of unpleasantness, "did not expect to find any one but caretakers here!"

"I stayed to hand over the keys to your lordship," said Sankey. "The keys of Braithside are never given to any one but the lord of the castle."

"But how did you know who I was?" asked the new earl.

"Your face, my lord. You are the image of them all."

Hudson Hemsley, Earl of Braithside, stood in the great hall, overwhelmed by its vastness and splendor. Its great arches towered up and were lost in the gloom of the ceiling. Suits of armor stood at intervals, like sentinels, in niches of the stone walls. It was as if they watched over the fame and honor of Braithside.

In the huge spaces of that room hundreds of men at arms had eaten and drunk in the years gone by. He, Hudson Hemsley—Mr. Hudson as he had called himself—had never had a meal anywhere except in the little parlor behind his shop, or in an eating house around the corner.

"Will you go up to your room, my lord, or will you take something first?" Sankey was saying.

Braithside was desperately hungry. He had traveled all day, and had eaten nothing. He considered the possibility of asking for sandwiches; but it was five o'clock in the afternoon. Perhaps you could hardly ask them to make sandwiches at that hour.

"Some tea and—er—bread and butter, please," he murmured. "And could I get hold of Mr. Merrivale? He is agent here, isn't he?"

"Mr. Merrivale is here, my lord—or he was a moment ago. If your lordship would care to wait in the library, I will find him. I will send tea to the library, my lord."

The meeting of Lord Braithside and his agent was a startling study in contrasts. Braithside was shabby and nervous. He wore the shiny Sunday clothes of an unsuccessful grocer. Merrivale, on the other hand, was a younger son of a great family. He was an Etonian, and a typical country gentleman.

He looked at the nervous, shrinking Earl of Braithside, and a hot flush underspread his tan. Braithside, miserably conscious of the other's pity, flushed also. He forgot to offer Merrivale any tea. He cleared his throat nervously and squared his jaw.

"I want to get this thing quite straight," he said. "The estate is in debt, isn't it?"

"The income about pays the interest," replied Merrivale.

"Some earls," said Braithside, fidgeting with a thin silver watch chain, "would borrow more money and—er—carry on the same way—keep all the servants and gardeners and so on, I mean; but I've always paid my way. My father left me the business when I was sixteen, and I've never been in debt. So I thought," he went on, "that if I shut up this place—lived in one room, you know—and let the gardens and the park grazing"—Merrivale winced—"and—er—did everything myself, I might get straight. In time, of course—in years of time."

"I understood that from your letter, sir," said Merrivale. "The personal staff has already gone, except Sankey. He goes to-morrow. Some of the estate people have gone. The gatekeepers went to-day; but most of the others cannot be turned out for three months—the gardeners and so on, I mean. You understand there is a certain—er—decency that must be observed in these matters. I do not anticipate that they will give you any trouble. People don't at Braithside. In three months' time all the estate cottages will be empty."

"And then," said Braithside, "I shall let the cottages and try to get the place on its feet. Of course, I know that people will resent it; but I have been a business man—I am not going to try to hide that—and this estate must be run on business lines until it pays its way. I have heard that many of the English nobility are in debt; but it does not seem very noble, to me, to borrow money to pay your butler."

Merrivale tapped his boot with his riding whip.

"It is no fun being in debt," he admitted thoughtfully.

"I dread it," said Hudson.

"I do not think your predecessors enjoyed it, sir," added Merrivale; "but Braithside employed a lot of people."

Braithside saw the point, and flushed.

"People will have to realize that business is business," he declared. "When a big firm goes to smash, the employees have to go, don't they? It's hard, of course, but it's no use arguing with facts. An estate is just like a business, as I see it."

Merrivale's lips twitched into a smile, but his eyes were somber.

"It is as one sees it," he said. "You will do your own agency business, sir? I will go through the estate books with you to-morrow, if that suits you."

III

In a very few days the new earl was alone at Braithside. He had made a tour of the estate with Merrivale, and had counted up the cottages and houses which, when released by retainers, could be profitably let.

It was astounding, once business stepped in, how an estate could be exploited. The forests could be sold for timber, and the gardens and hothouses let to enterprising market gardeners. The coverts would pay best if let for shooting. A few keepers must be employed, to look after the game, but all the extravagant personnel of a great estate could be swept away—park keepers, foresters, bailiffs, the clerk of the works, gardeners, and engineers. Oh, yes, it all looked surprisingly simple—on paper.

One extravagance the new earl permitted himself. He kept Sankey, the steward.

The fact that Sankey stayed at the castle was a surprise both to Braithside and to Sankey.

The earl had intended that Sankey should leave the next day — especially when he heard the amount of the steward's salary; and Sankey had never intended to stay with the grocer earl. Many things had he endured at Braithside. The tenth earl—that would be the elder brother of the present man's grandfather—had thrown a book at him because he sneezed in the library; but indeed that was excusable. A steward should not permit himself to sneeze.

The eleventh earl had suffered from lumbago and gout. No blame, therefore, could be attached to his treatment of his steward; but the young earl who had just died—Hudson's second cousin—had been really trying. He was frequently tormented by green devils. He threw bottles at them, and hit Sankey every time. He was constantly worried by innumerable pink rats, which nibbled his toes.

It was hard to know how to please his lordship, because he called Sankey at all hours to inquire if he, too, saw the rats. If the steward agreed that he saw them, the earl would cling to him with the insensate terror of a child, cursing and imploring by turns, as the creatures grew bolder and bolder. If, on the other hand, Sankey failed to see rats, the consequences were still more terrible; for the earl would scream and rave at his stupidity.

But the other earls had lived royally, entertained royally, and died royally. They went deeper and deeper in debt, it is true, as times grew harder; but they were kind to their tenantry and servants, and were loved by the countryside.

And then had come the thirteenth earl, the grocer earl—the man who not only was not ashamed of being a grocer, but who meant to put his grocery notions into practice at Braithside. He was going to live in one room—to dismiss everybody—to pay his way. Sankey had determined to stay long enough to hand him the keys, and to tell the grocer earl certain things that he—even he—must know.

Next morning he led Braithside to the chapel. Here, behind the stone tracery of a little chapel of ease, he pointed out the recumbent effigy of the first earl. At the first earl's feet, beautifully carved in stone, knelt his wife.

"The Lady Joan, my lord," whispered Sankey. Then he pointed to two candles that burned on the altar. "The candles here are never allowed to go out, my lord," he said. "It was the Lady Joan's wish, and she left money for the purpose. It is the duty of the steward of Braithside to see that those candles are always burning. New ones are placed there before the old ones go out."

Hudson Hemsley looked at the date on the tomb.

"Six hundred years ago!" he said.

"Yes, my lord," replied Sankey.

They stood silently before the tomb for a moment. The blue light from a rose window struck down upon the thirteenth earl's thin, ascetic face. It also lighted up the stone features of the first earl. Line for line, feature for feature, the two men were alike—the grocer and the crusader.

"One more thing, my lord," whispered Sankey.

He beckoned Braithside to another tomb—a tiny one. Upon it lay some roses.

"Fresh flowers are placed here every day, my lord. His lordship the old earl—the tenth, my lord—promised her ladyship that flowers should never be lacking. He promised it when her ladyship was dying, my lord. Flowers have been here ever since. It was the first baby."

Slowly they went out of the exquisite little chapel, with its Gothic arches, into the sunshine. Hudson Hemsley's face was pensive and his eyes troubled.

"The Braithside promises — they have always been kept?" he murmured.

Sankey did not reply, and the grocer earl felt the rebuke.

"I think, Sankey," he said, "that you had better stay. There might be promises, or obligations, which I might forget."

And Sankey, who had seen the grocer earl side by side with the crusader, merely murmured:

"Very good, my lord."

IV

THE county was in no hurry to call upon the grocer earl, as he was speedily nicknamed. Braithside was pleased, on the whole—although there was one woman whom he was secretly anxious to see. This was Lady Venice Ramsden, the daughter of the old Marquis of Winchley, a widower. For Lady Venice, the new earl had heard, had been engaged to his cousin, the twelfth Earl of Braithside. Had the marriage taken place, he, Hudson Hemsley, might never have been the earl.

Unaccountably he longed to see this woman who was to have been Lady Braithside—who might have borne a son who would have left him, Hudson, in obscurity.

He met Venice Ramsden in an unexpected way. In fact, he tumbled over her. He was passing from one field to another, across a narrow, winding country lane, when he stumbled over a figure, which at first he took to be a youth, but which he found to be a girl, lying unconscious by the gate. She was clad in the orthodox motorcycling costume, and an overturned machine explained her condition. It was only when Hudson pulled off her cap that he discovered that he was succoring a girl.

He fetched water from a near-by pond, and bathed her temples. She opened her eyes almost immediately, and stared with the bewilderment of returning consciousness into his face.

"Harold?" she half whispered.

"No," said Braithside. "It is not Harold. He is dead. I am his cousin, Hudson Hemsley."

The girl closed her eyes again.

"I thought I was dead, too—that's all," she said.

Braithside slipped his arm under her shoulder and gathered her up. He was a tall man, and she was slight. He carried her to the castle.

"Lady Venice Ramsden, my lord," said Sankey, when the earl laid his burden on the great carved table in the hall. "I'll telephone for the doctor."

But Venice Ramsden opened her eyes again.

"I don't think I need a doctor, Sankey," she smiled.

Then she looked at the grocer earl.

"This table is very hard!" she said.

"I was afraid for your back—" began Braithside.

"It's not my back—it's my head. If I might rest for a little in the library? Will you help me, Sankey?"

Braithside did not fail to notice that Lady Venice appealed to Sankey, and not to him, for assistance. Of course, she knew Sankey; yet he wished it had been he.

In the library he poured out the brandy the steward brought. The girl's hands shook as she tried to take the glass, and Braithside held the tumbler to her lips.

"All this must be a terrible shock," he murmured. "First your fall—and then I am afraid my likeness to my cousin must have upset you. Perhaps, too, it is disturbing to have been brought here, where—where—"

He was blundering on, more to cover his dire confusion than to make intelligent conversation; but he stopped, realizing that the girl's face grew whiter and her eyes glistened. It was a tiger gleam.

"Go on!" she said, dangerously calm. "Please go on! You think it is disturbing for me to have been brought here, where, where—where I hoped to be chatelaine? That is what you mean, isn't it?"

Braithside, at a loss for words, stared into the beautiful, proud face.

"Did you suppose it mattered to me?" she asked sharply. "The castle and the title, I mean?"

"Why, no," gasped Hudson. "That was not my meaning. I know you have a great name, and are heiress to possessions of your own. I know, too, that you would never have contemplated marrying my cousin for any other motive than love."

"Your creed is a simple one, Lord Braithside!"

"I am a simple man. I know I have much to learn. I wish I had not mentioned my cousin, since it has annoyed you."

There was a long pause. Then Venice Ramsden looked at Braithside and half smiled.

"I was going to marry Harold, not because I loved him, but because I loved Braithside. No—not Braithside, exactly, but the things it stands for—its traditions—its promises."

"Promises?" murmured the earl.

"Promises—which you are breaking. It was to save Braithside from such a fate as you are bringing upon it that I agreed to marry Harold."

"I do not understand you," said Hudson. "I have broken no promises that I know of."

"No!" said the girl. "No—you do not understand me." She made a little gesture of despair. "If you will ask Sankey to telephone for a car, I should like to go home now."

"I hope your head is better," remarked Braithside.

"Much better. I feel a little giddy—that's all."

"I will phone for the car in a moment, Lady Venice. Do you feel too ill to talk? There are some things that I want to ask you."

"Go on, then!"

"I must put things bluntly. I am not used to speaking to people of your class."

The girl stirred impatiently.

"But this is what I cannot understand. You are a great heiress—every one knows that; and you were prepared to marry my cousin, a drunkard and a bankrupt and a man whom you did not love, in order that Braithside should keep its promises. What promises?"

"The tacit obligations by which every great landowner is bound to his people. Oh, you do not understand; but the thing you are doing is what Harold's creditors might have done. They would have run Braithside as a business concern — which would have meant turning out the simple people who have lived here and died here for generations and generations; people who have looked upon the Earls of Braithside, not as masters, but as protectors and friends; people who have nowhere to go, and little hope of earning an adequate livelihood; people from whom the promise of life and peace and happiness has been snatched. Those are the promises you are breaking. Two hundred and fifty people—men, women, and children—are to leave Braithside next month!"

The earl fought for his viewpoint.

"I do not see it in that way," he argued. "I cannot sell anything. Everything is mortgaged. How can I keep on these people without plunging further into debt? I hate debt. I have always paid my way."

"You prate of honesty," sneered Lady Venice; "but what you are really seeking is comfort—freedom from worry and anxiety. Do you think Harold enjoyed being in debt? It drove him to drink; yet he played the game."

"The game?"

"The game that you will never understand, Lord Braithside!"

"One moment—did my cousin know that you were making such a sacrifice? Did he know that you were prepared to marry him, to bear him a son, just so as to preserve the traditions of your class?"

"Marriage is sometimes justified upon other grounds than love," said Lady Venice.

V

"SANKEY," said the grocer earl, as Lady Venice drove away, "I find I have much to learn."

"Yes, my lord," agreed the steward.

"They are things I never meant to learn," continued Braithside. "I thought I despised such things; but I find now that even honesty can be relative."

He fidgeted with his watch chain—a nervous habit.

"A grocer," he went on, "has no very great problems. If he pays his way, if he doesn't put sand in the sugar, he is an honest man; but an earl does not find things so simple."

"No, my lord," agreed Sankey.

Braithside wheeled around upon him.

"Sankey, you might help me," he said. "What would you do if you were in my place?"

Sankey considered.

"The former earls always found a way, my lord," he said. "Sometimes they gambled, and sometimes they borrowed. Some of the Countesses of Braithside have been rich women."

The new earl frowned at that, and his jaw squared; but Sankey's voice went on evenly:

"Many a wealthy lady would be proud to become the Countess of Braithside."

"But what if I did not love the lady, Sankey?"

"That she would never know, my lord. A gentleman may marry for other reasons than love."

There was a slight emphasis upon the word "gentleman." Braithside had been miserably aware that he was not a gentleman. He smiled now, wryly, at the strange manner in which he was to qualify.

That night Braithside wrote to Lady Venice—ostensibly to inquire after her health. It was a formal, stilted letter—the new earl's first literary plunge into the social world; and Venice Ramsden might have smiled at its clumsy, laboring effort, had it not been for the last paragraph.

That last paragraph was startling in its stride from diffident formality to direct challenge. It ran:

> I have been thinking about you, and about what you said. The line of conduct you hint that a man in my position might be justified in adopting still seems to me to be wrong; but I also realize that no course that you countenance could be other than right and honorable. I will try to do what I think you would have me do—not because I am convinced, or because I understand, but because I think it is your bidding.

"My bidding!" murmured Venice.

Braithside lost no time. Sankey, having been appealed to, helped him. He borrowed some money — enough to give the Braithside retainers a longer lease of life, in the shape of a six months' extension of notice. Then, furnished with a suitable wardrobe and a valet specially instructed by Sankey, he proceeded to a Continental watering place crowded, at the moment, by the newly rich.

The thing was almost too easy. Braithside, who insisted that he was not a gentleman, yet had a heritage of breeding. His diffidence and shyness were taken for haughty reserve. The fact that he used the wrong fork, or chose the wrong wine, was looked upon as the caprice of the socially spoiled; and Mellins, his valet, saw that he wore the right clothes and did the things that everybody was expected to do at Deauville.

At the end of a week there were several fair competitors for the countess's coronet; for Mellins had discreetly whispered that his lordship was fortune hunting. Some of the ladies were charming. This surprised Braithside. He imagined that the girl who bought a husband and a title must necessarily be hard-eyed and cold. He had read of such women.

But the girls of to-day, rich and poor alike, are sophisticated. The rich girl buys a husband and a home, exactly as a poor girl may sell herself for them. They know the price of everything, these girls—even of happiness; and a dozen women at Deauville smiled into Braithside's dreamy, kindly eyes, and saw a promise—nay, a certainty—of a life of contentment with such a man.

One woman alone, and she the least prepossessing, frankly cared more for his lordship's position than his person. She was Glennis Lyle.

"He's not my sort," she told her mother. "He won't dance, he won't come to the pictures, and he doesn't care for the music I like. If I marry him, he will read books and ride around his estate. I shall be terribly bored!"

"On the other hand," said Mrs. Lyle, "he will let you do exactly what you like, and he will do what he can to please you. I should try to get him."

"Well, I'm trying," replied Glennis. "I want Braithside. I'm going to be perfectly honest, mother. If he asks me to marry him, I'll do it on the straight!"

Mrs. Lyle sighed.

"Your father made all his money on the straight," she said. "You are like him, Glennis; but sometimes I wish you were a little more—er—diplomatic. Lord Braithside is very likable."

"And that," said Glennis, "is a thing you are overlooking, mother. Frankly, I'm not in love with him; but other women are. Look at that American girl! She's out for a title, too, of course, but she wants the man. She never takes her eyes off him; and if he's fortune hunting, he might just as well marry a woman who'll love him. It's not likely that he'll look at me."

But the improbable happened.

Three weeks convinced Braithside that many women were prepared, not only to marry him, but to love him. The discovery bewildered him, for love and women had formed no part of his career. Also, it embarrassed him; for, although he was immensely touched by the extraordinary kindness of these ladies, and overwhelmed by their graciousness, he was distressed to find himself totally unresponsive.

If he could love one of them, as they clearly showed him they loved him, how simple his problem would be! He had set out with deliberate purpose. It was to be a commercial affair—a marriage without love. He would offer a lady a title and an old estate; and she—she would enable him to keep the Braithside promises.

But now the problem was infinitely complicated. As he listened to the soft, cooing voice of the turtle dove—to voices that flattered—he remembered the glint in the eyes of the girl on the sofa at Braithside.

"Of course you will never understand!" she had said.

And so he had gone to Glennis Lyle. Glennis had never flattered him. She had looked at him with slightly quizzical eyes.

"I do not pretend to understand you, or to sympathize with your ideals," she had said. "I am of the people."

The earl neglected to remind her that he had served sugar—honest sugar, too—across a counter. Somehow the grocery business had slipped into the background of his mind since he had met Venice Ramsden. He came to the point with a rush, as the blooded horse takes a hedge which he knows he cannot clear.

"Miss Lyle," he said, "Braithside needs a mistress. You tell me frankly that you have no sympathy with my ideals. I—I fear I have nothing to offer but immense respect and—and gratitude. I think I am incapable of love. That is why—"

"Oh, my dear chap, cut it short!" interrupted Glennis. "I know exactly what you mean. Candidly, you're out for money. I do not see why, with my fortune, I should not have a title; so we understand each other. There is no love lost between us, but we sincerely respect each other. We will play the game!"

"That," replied the earl, "is how I see it, too."

Glennis leaned across the little tea table.

"But there are women here who do love you," she said.

"I cannot take what I cannot return," Braithside told her.

There was a moment's silence. Then Glennis said:

"Is there no woman you love?"

The earl thought. A hot color suffused his cheeks and faded again. A light leaped to his eyes and died out.

"Not that I am aware of," he said.

And what he said was literally true, for he did not know.

VI

SANKEY was bidden by telegram to prepare Braithside for the visit of Mrs. and Miss Lyle. As few of the old servants had found places of the kind they wanted, the steward had no difficulty in reëngaging the staff that had looked upon Braithside as home all their lives. Soon the castle, inside and out, was alive and humming with the activity and promise of life.

The grocer earl had slipped away. In his place had come a son of the Braithside fathers—a man who held the happiness of hundreds of little people in the hollow of his hand, and in whose keeping it was safe. When Glennis Lyle arrived upon her visit, the flower beds were gay and the lawns like velvet. In the park, the deer moved from spreading oak to the deep shade of copper beech. Children, running to the gates of the cottages, smiled their sweet, shy, confident smile of faith. All was well with Braithside.

But with the earl and Glennis all was not well. Unrest had crept into the eyes of both. Neither was aware of it. Neither would admit it; but Venice Ramsden saw it when she and her father called.

Venice and the earl strolled together around the gardens. Lord Winchley and Mrs. and Miss Lyle sat under the trees on the lawn.

"Well?" said the earl.

"I do not think I understand," said Venice.

"I mean, now that I have done your bidding, is it well?"

Although Venice loved flowers, she was tearing one to pieces.

"I do not know," she said. "I—I hope you will be happy!"

"Does that matter, compared to the happiness of Braithside?"

Venice's answer was almost below her breath. It was so low that the earl bent his ear to catch it.

"Ah, yes!" she murmured. "It matters—your happiness matters!"

Lord Winchley, as he saw his daughter and Braithside returning, rose to say good-by. For the last quarter of an hour he had been fretting with the knowledge of an overdue appointment. He held Glennis Lyle's hand in his for a moment.

"I hope you will be very happy when you come to live among us," he said in his courtly way.

And Glennis, her eyes upon the figures of Venice Ramsden and Hudson Hemsley, as they paused for a moment under an arch of roses, smiled a little bitterly.

"Does happiness count in these sophisticated days?" she asked.

Lord Winchley was of the old school—a sentimentalist.

"Dear young lady, as you will know one day, happiness is the only thing that counts," he said.

As he turned away, he wondered why Glennis's eyes had suddenly clouded, and why her lips had pressed together, as if to suppress a gasp of pain.

Alone with the earl in the billiard room, after dinner, idly fidgeting with her cue, Glennis had faced the truth.

"I have always played straight," she said; "and I have begun to realize that—that happiness counts."

"Could you find no happiness here?" he asked gently.

"Once," replied Glennis, "I thought so. Once I thought one could marry without love—that the title and all that would be enough; but now—"

"I—I want your life to be a happy one, Glennis!"

The earl's eyes were steeped in pain as he spoke.

"Oh, I am not thinking of my happiness only," said Glennis. "I am thinking of yours also. Can we find happiness together, you and I? You know we cannot. I suppose you will say that it was not in the bond."

The earl groped for his newly acquired philosophy.

"Happiness counts," he said; "but the happiness of many is more important than that of the individual. The bargain, as we struck it, stands, does it not? Or—or—do you repent it?"

Glennis slowly chalked her cue.

"I think," she said, "I will make a bid for happiness, if—if you will release me from my promise!"

"Glennis," said the earl, "I would never stand in the way of your happiness. I hope, more than I can possibly express, that you will find it with some one worthier than I!"

VII

Mrs. and Miss Lyle left the next day in their great car. The earl stood beside it as he bade them farewell, and raised Glennis's fingers to his lips. The fingers trembled, he noticed.

"Glennis," said Mrs. Lyle, as the car slid away, "I wish you were not so downright! Why did you tell him you could not be happy with him? Any woman could love that man!"

"I did not say I could not be happy," replied Glennis. "I said that happiness counts, and I said that I was making a bid for happiness; but it was his, not mine. He loves Lady Venice Ramsden. Couldn't you see that?"

Mrs. Lyle groaned.

"You always played straight, Glennis—like your father," she murmured; "but—but, my dear, didn't you love him?"

"Don't!" said Glennis.

"My world is in pieces, and I have been a fool!" said the Earl of Braithside.

He said it to Venice Ramsden, whom he had sought immediately after the Lyles' departure. She was sitting on the old stone coping that cupped a fountain. The water flung the glinting sunlight hither and thither in glancing prisms. The rustling leaves dappled the pool with light and shade.

"A fool to follow my bidding?" murmured Venice.

"Yes!" The earl sat down on the stone coping beside Venice. "A man must work out his own salvation, dear lady," he said. "He may not learn chivalry by blindly following instructions. He must understand the meaning of knighthood. I know now why I did not deserve to succeed."

"Yes?"

"Yes—I will tell you. The bargain I tried to make was sordid, because it entailed no sacrifice. It was a buying and a selling. It would have been a marriage without love, unhallowed by sacrifice. See how different your marriage to Harold would have been! You were prepared to give your great name, your wonderful self, in order that a number of small people might be happy. You were sheltering a host of little homes in the shadow of your angel's wings. You gave everything, to take nothing. That is the essence of chivalry—to give, without reward!"

Venice's eyes were upon the flashing colors of the fountain. Perhaps that accounted for the wonderful light that shone in them.

"Once," she said softly, "I told you that you would never understand. I take that back. Once you said that you had much to learn."

"And have I not much to learn?" asked the earl. His face, white and strained, was bent to hers. His eyes, dark and hungry, instinctively sought hers. "There is so much that I do not know!" he said. "I have never known a woman's love. My mother died when I was a baby. I am so rough, so entirely unschooled in the ways of women—and in the things that matter most in life!"

Venice turned to him suddenly. Her eyes laughed.

"But you have a wonderful intuition!" she said. Her softly curved lips were close to his. She laughed into his bewildered face. "Nevertheless, you have much to learn!" she teased.

"Venice! Venice! Will you teach me?" he whispered.

She bent forward and kissed him on the lips.

"I will begin now," she said.

A BALLADE OF SIMPLE BODIES

The people I like are quiet folk,
Not much for show and not much for speed,
For whom life's a sort of wistful joke,
A book as amusing as "Candide,"
With chapters in it too sad to read;
Folk not ashamed to go on their knees
To the Unseen Awe in their hour of need—
Simple bodies, easy to please!

A corncob pipe is their favorite smoke,
And an old-fashioned nag is their favorite steed;
A sober suit and a homespun cloak,
And to match them some old kind-hearted creed.
To the latest fashions they pay no heed,
And a jug of ale and a musty cheese
To them is the best of good fare indeed—
Simple bodies, easy to please!

Wild youth that all the commandments broke,
The feathered cap and the flashing deed—
They have put them by, and they wear the yoke
Of the quiet stars as their days recede
From the noise and the nothingness that "succeed,"
And the soul from the empty tumult flees,
As the world roars by in its hot stampede—
Simple bodies, easy to please!

ENVOI

Prince, from the pother of passions freed,
In the shade philosophic of ancient trees
We smile, as the lunatics take the lead—
Simple bodies, easy to please!

Richard Le Gallienne

The Cherry Velvet Ribbon

BEVERLY PAGE IS UNEXPECTEDLY REMINDED OF WHAT SHE WORE FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

By Mariel Brady

THE embroidery salesman let the strap which he had been adjusting on his bulging sample case slide to the floor. He took three quick steps to the glass-paneled door.

"Say, who's that?"

Cephas Doolittle, sole proprietor of the Paris Dry Goods Emporium in the sleepy little town of Dorcastle, followed his pointing finger with indolent interest.

"Her in brown?" he inquired negligently, squinting after the slender, erect figure crossing the street. "That's Beverly Page. Don't get all het up, George! Old maid, you know. The wife went to school with her, and she's around the third corner, all right! Good-looker, though, ain't she? But you want to save your eyes for her niece. She's easy to look at, I tell you—pretty young girl, sort of clipper-built and yaller-headed."

The bald-headed drummer grunted a little as he bent for his strap.

"These tank towns make me tired," he grumbled. "Homeliest married women I ever saw, and all the good-looking ones left to dry up into old maids. What's the matter with the he-males of this burg, Doolittle? Blind as bats, huh?"

Cephas pursed his loose lips and frowned harmlessly. The slender figure in brown had turned the next corner. He hooked his pudgy thumbs into the armholes of his vest, and rocked slowly upon his square toes and squarer heels.

"Well, now, I'll tell you, George," he stated judicially. "There's some women too derned particular—too cussed particular, if you want to know. That Page girl's one. She'll go through the woods with her nose high as a meetinghouse steeple, and she'll come out with a crooked stick yet, I'll warrant!"

The traveling man let one knowing eyelid droop significantly on his plump cheek.

"So that's the way of it!" he observed blandly, picking up his case. "Little Miss Iceberg to all you hicks, eh? Well, I don't blame her for saving herself for something better—not even after a casual survey of the eligibles around here, I don't; but all I got to say is, if Broadway once lamped that queen—"

II

THE queen walked swiftly home. She let herself into the low brown house under the bare maples, and closed the door with a jubilant bang. Her cheeks, usually pale, were a clear pink, and her gray eyes sparkled. She had caught the portly drummer's look of open admiration, and it had gone to her head like old wine. Women, even the chastest of them, who have been shelved by younger and prettier ones, are gorgeously thrilled by these unexpected tributes. The fleeting hours of beauty are still theirs, and a stranger's eyes have rendered delightful homage.

"Marie Louise!" she called, with the lilt of excitement still in her clear tones. "It's fearfully cold out. How's the furnace?"

A pin-muffled voice came from upstairs. "I don't know, dearest. I've been so fearfully busy fixing over my orchid voile for to-night. You know there's a dance after our play, and I haven't a thing but this old rag."

Miss Page sighed.

"All right!" she said resignedly. "I'll see to it. I suppose you'll want dinner a little early, won't you? I'll tell Rhuey."

She ran lightly down the cellar stairs, wrestled triumphantly with a chronically sulky furnace, and came up to wash her hands in Rhuey's immaculate kitchen.

Beverly Page was poor. What she did to eke out her meager salary as a teacher no one knew, but the low brown house under the maples sheltered her orphan niece, Marie Louise, and a distant cousin, Rhua Scofield, who went through life with no money in her purse, but with a perpetual chip on her bony shoulder.

"Oh, Rhuey!" began Miss Page diplomatically. "I smelled that delicious spice cake the minute I opened the hall door. Do you suppose you could have dinner a little earlier to-night? Marie Louise wants to get off to her play by seven. It takes so long to make them up, you know, and of course Marie Louise has the most important part. Never thought we'd own a leading lady, did we, Rhuey?"

Rhuey sniffed. Her thin lips set themselves in a straight line, which matched the rest of her. Miss Scofield's *tout ensemble* resembled nothing so much as a bed slat dressed in gray percale, and her skin looked just like that peculiar wood at the end of a bed slat, too.

"Don't know why I should slave myself sick to get dinner for that pert little snip!" she said acridly. "Never give me no reserved seat for her play, neither! I ain't goin' to set in no gallery. In my purple silk I'm good enough for the front row, or I'll stay to home. She meant it for a slight, Beverly, and she's just as much poor relation as I be."

"Oh, no, she didn't! Marie Louise is just thoughtless and young, and every one spoils her, Rhuey. I've a reserved seat for you—two, if you want them. Shall I help you with dinner, Rhuey? Let me peel the potatoes. You know you hate to."

"You clear out of my kitchen, Beverly Page! I guess I'm able to get dinner yet awhile, but I ain't no slave to drive. Us girls don't have to jump at no Marie Louise's crack of the whip, as I see it. In my purple silk I'm good enough to set next to anybody in this town!"

Rhuey was fifty-eight and indomitably young. Miss Page sighed a little as she looked at the spare, erect figure. She would be older than Rhuey at fifty-eight, if these eternal bickerings kept up.

"Of course," she conceded smoothly. "Well, if you won't let me help, I'll go up and see what our young lady is doing."

Rhuey rattled her muffin pan and set her lips more tightly.

"Our young lady on your side of the house—don't forget that, Beverly Page! Us Scofields keeps our brains in our heads, not our heels. She'll be a common dancin' hussy on the stage yet, you mark my words! Then you and me'll be alone here, 'ceptin' you take up with that meachin' dominie. He called up again this afternoon, drat him! Wants you should come to-night and help hang all them fool Christmas greens. He can do his own hangin'. I up and told him you had somethin' better to do than climbin' stepladders for nothin'. Told him you was goin' to the High School play with Mrs. Dr. Forbes and Mrs. Hilliard. He can put that in his pipe and smoke it!"

"Rhuey! You didn't?"

Rhuey gave the oven door a militant bang.

"Did so! I don't aim to have no dominie bossin' me. If you've got to have a man around, Beverly, for the land's sake, get a he-man. I never could abide a meachin' dominie nor a pussy-footin' doctor."

Beverly went upstairs quietly. She turned the handle of her own door, and stopped dead short on the threshold.

Before the long pier glass between the two windows was poised an exquisite little figure. A swirl of light green chiffon draped the slender body. Glinting yellow hair, bobbed and beautifully curled, framed the purely tinted, heart shaped little face, and revealed the lovely lines of the girlish throat and shoulders.

"Marie Louise! You've had your hair bobbed! After all I've said!"

Marie Louise smiled charmingly over a satin shoulder. At the age of nine she had definitely given up thinking. Smiling brought the same results, apparently with less effort. How she got along in school was a mystery. She never studied, yet never failed in her work. Every teacher can point out just such an anomaly in her classes.

"Yes, dearest," she agreed prettily. "All the girls have, you know." Her voice was unexpectedly low-pitched, and full of haunting cadences. "Besides, I lost all my hairpins at rehearsal this afternoon. That last solo dance is rather strenuous. Isn't this dress just dear?"

"What there is of it," agreed her aunt dryly, crossing the room.

For a moment she stared down at the beautiful head in abstracted silence. Then she said quietly:

"Marie Louise, after to-night I want you to give up—this sort of thing. You'll be through school in June, and you're going to have college somehow. I want you to make it count, dear. Then, in four years, I'll get you a position in the High School here, and I'll stay home and cook for you, as we've always planned. I can hardly wait for the time to come. If you knew how deadly tired I am of being cooped up with fifty-odd restless, squirming youngsters five days a week, forty weeks a year, and more than twelve years out of a lifetime! I loathe it! I want to stay in my little house and clean silver and make crullers and—"

"Aunty," cut in Marie Louise sweetly, her lovely eyes on one straight lock of yellow hair, "haven't you a curling iron handy? I knew that wretched barber made too quick a job of it. The girls said so. Just curl this for me—that's a love! I'm really sorry you've seen this costume. I wanted to spring it on you when all the lights go out, and you'll see just your little Marie Louise singing and dancing by the pool in the enchanted forest. And, dearest, just think! Mrs. Hilliard is having Rancinelli up just to see what he thinks of me! Isn't that perfectly gorgeous?"

III

A VERY silent Miss Page made a pretense of eating Rhuey's delicious dinner, helped a pink-cheeked, starry-eyed young niece into a borrowed fur coat, and saw her off in somebody's luxurious limousine. Marie Louise never walked — several somebodies always wanted to drive her.

Silent still, Beverly locked the doors after the flurried Rhuey and her crackling purple silk. Rhuey always went early. Seeing the audience come in was the best part of the entertainment, to her mind.

Half an hour later a still silent, tight-lipped woman stared somberly at her reflection in the long pier glass. A hot bath had rested her, cold cream and ice had freshened her cheeks—school-teachers have to do these things, or the taxpayers would begin to worry about the precious children shut up all day with that sickly-looking Miss Jones.

She had on a black lace gown which had been made over, and made over, and made over. You know the feeling you have when you're inside a gown like that. Bronze hair and charming gray eyes and a cleft chin do not seem to count for much. Besides, when you are entertaining a large-sized suspicion that your most beautiful air castle is toppling to its fall, and that you've got to keep on and on teaching successive generations of children that the Amazon is the largest river in the world—

Beverly Page looked at her reflection very somberly indeed. Then she opened the closet door and brought out a tan cape, hopelessly out of style, which no self-respecting factory girl would have worn on a bet. What is more to the point, no one would expect a factory girl to wear it; but every teacher has such garments in her closet. The taxpayers would raise more than their eyebrows at a fur coat, you know.

Sighing resignedly, Miss Page slipped her black lace shoulders into the old thing and snapped out the light. The tan cape was warm, anyway, being lined with moth-eaten squirrel fur, and Miss Page intended to walk, and to walk fast. Most school-teachers do.

The High School auditorium, seating about six hundred if you didn't mind squeezing or injury to a pet corn, and five hundred if you did, was jammed and crowded when Miss Page, blinking from the sudden blaze of light after the cold darkness of her walk, slipped off the old tan cape and made her entrance.

Mrs. T. Osborne Hilliard, with too many waves in her coiffure, too many sequins glinting on her expansive bosom, too many diamonds on her pudgy fingers, rose, center front, third row, and waved a commanding cerise fan. Miss Page, in the wake of a starchy young usher, painfully conscious of the glories of his first dress suit, trailed meekly to a reserved seat beside the social luminary of the town.

Mrs. Hilliard's husband was chairman of the Board of Education. It was his only diversion, and the monthly meetings were the only evenings he could get away from his red-tiled stucco bungalow of fourteen ornate rooms and forty-four different kinds of discomfort.

The whole board was present, just at the right of the stage, and rigid with the consciousness of being the temporary cynosure of all eyes. Their quietude may also have been partly due to a fervent desire not to split, publicly, their extremely glove-fitting evening clothes, which smelled to heaven of moth balls and cedar, since these festal garments were dragged forth from their fragrant obscurity but twice yearly.

Mrs. Hilliard's husband had most unwisely tried to drown his perfume with a deluge of Florida water, with most unhappy results. He sat in wretched isolation at the extreme end of the front row, his fellow sufferers gladly allowing him three chairs for himself and his essences.

The school orchestra nervously blared into something entirely beyond them, the violins being especially suggestive of fifty-seven various keys. The lights went out, came on again, disappeared once more. The green cloth curtains were yanked clankingly aside, and the play was on.

If you were a proud parent with a son or daughter in the cast, the play was simply great. If you had a son or daughter in the school, but not in the cast, it was pretty fair, considering, but why on earth was that poor fish of a Smith boy given the lead? Everybody knew him for a bonehead, and of all the gangling, awkward, overgrown young turkeys! Why, his hands were like hams!

If you were merely an innocent bystander, you tried to recall your own salad days, and made allowances. If you achieved a visit to the city once a year to see Maude Adams or Faversham or Grace George, you yawned and consulted the clock hanging over the bust of Aristotle in the corner.

If you were a teacher in the school, especially a coach, you had cold chills fox-trotting up your spine, and your teeth clenched when that little fool of a Rosamond ruined her scene. The tortures of the Spanish Inquisition would be mild compared to the punishment you would inflict on her idiotic head!

If you were a reporter for the local newspaper, you eyed the performance with a cynical grin, and wondered how much mush you would have to spread over your column account of the affair before the adoring relatives would be satiated.

That is, you did these things until a very wabbly spotlight found Marie Louise, a slender young dryad in filmy green, in the center of a dark stage, and she began to dance. Then you never moved a muscle. You barely breathed. Even the cynical reporter leaned forward and forgot his superior smile. Presently, when the softly parted lips of the dancer widened a little, and a golden flood of melody rose higher, higher, like a lark's song at heaven's gate on the dewiest June morning of the year, a most unaccountable lump gathered in the young man's throat, and his eyes misted behind his owlish glasses.

When the last high, sweet note ended no one could say. It died away as imperceptibly as a rainbow fades in the heavens; but the utter quiet of that darkened, crowded hall was a perfect tribute to the born artistry of young Marie Louise Page, singing her challenge to destiny. For a long moment the stillness lasted, and then the storm of applause broke.

" Very clever!" purred Mrs. T. Osborne Hilliard, putting down her utterly useless *lorgnon*. " I always knew she had it in her, my dear Miss Page. Rancinelli is somewhere in the rear. He refused point-blank to sit with us. So trying, but you know the eccentricities of genius must be indulged. If he offers our dear little girl an engagement in his new opera, her future is made!"

Beverly's throat contracted painfully. Her hot palms clenched themselves on folds of the old lace gown.

" I have other plans for Marie Louise," she said unevenly. " As you say, she is but a little girl. She has four years more of study, at the least. A singer's life, a dancer's life, even a very successful one, is not what I want for Marie Louise."

" But the little one belongs to the great world. You have no right to keep her from it," a grave voice said.

Beverly Page looked up. A tall, lean man was bending deferentially over her. The mark of the cosmopolite was upon him, from silvered temples to shining boot tips.

The lights had flared up, and people were moving about or talking excitedly.

" Oh, M'sieur Rancinelli!" fluttered Mrs. Hilliard, who made no distinction between French and Italian prefixes. " Let me present Miss Page—Marie Louise's aunt, you know. Wasn't our little thistledown just charming?"

Rancinelli did not lift his eyes from Beverly's troubled face.

" A year with me, and she will be more than charming," he said quietly, with hardly a trace of accent in his even tones. " Do not take it so to heart, Miss Page. Have you not seen that the little one is of the world? What is of the world cannot be harmed by it. It is inevitable that she will go out from your arms. Better with me than many another. The world—ah, she will stamp her little feet upon its heart, and it will worship her. You have seeing eyes, Miss Page, and have mothered her, she says. Can you not believe that what I say is true?"

Beverly rose blindly.

"I must get out," she whispered feverishly. "Excuse me, please, but I must see Marie Louise."

As she went swiftly down the deserted corridor toward the dressing room, Rhuey's spare figure darted from a side door of the hall, and Rhuey's excited voice hailed her.

"Beverly, wait a minute! What 'd I tell you? A common dancin' hussy! They're all sayin', back there, that that's what 'll come of this night's doin's. I told you so, Beverly Page! You'll sup sorrow with her yet. Don't you wait for me after the show, Beverly. I got company home!"

She was actually bridling. Miss Page stared at her stupidly.

"Who is it?" she murmured vaguely.

Rhuey achieved a blush.

"Mr. Peters, the iceman," she announced proudly. "That was his daughter in pink. Now don't say a word, Beverly Page. If I can git him, I'm goin' to. It's turrible at my age to have no home and be nothin' but a poor relation. I'm sick and tired of livin' in a house full of women, anyway. I like the smell of a man around—always did. He's a decent widow man with his own house and only one girl—a nice girl, too. If I can git him, I'm goin' to. I'm goin' to make a dead set at him, if you want to know. You can be an old maid forever, if you want to, but I want to come first with somebody afore I die!"

With lifted chin and a defiant flirt of the purple silk, Rhuey swept back into the hall, where the lights had been lowered for the third act. Dazed, Miss Page stared back after her for a full moment; then she knocked sharply on the dressing room door.

Marie Louise's exquisite voice answered her. She turned the knob and went in.

Surrounded by flowers, Marie Louise was radiant. She was still in her green dancing dress, the make-up thick upon her oval cheeks and about her wide, brilliant eyes. She flew to Beverly with a little coo of rapture.

"Dearest, you liked me? I was a success, wasn't I? They meant it—that applause—bless 'em! Oh, you can't imagine how wonderful it is to hold the heart of a crowd like that right in your palm!"

She opened her slender pink fingers and then closed them slowly, lovingly.

"Are you quoting Rancinelli?" demanded her aunt coldly. "Get that stuff off your face quickly. You're entirely too keen for this false excitement, Marie Louise. It isn't good for so young a girl, and I want you to think seriously what you are doing. That man, that producer, Rancinelli, will offer you an engagement. My dear, you've lived seventeen years with me in our shabby little home. Can you so easily forget these seventeen years for a stranger's glittering promises? You must go on with your education, Marie Louise. In these days a half educated person has no chance at all. I hope you have not encouraged Rancinelli to believe that I should allow you—"

Marie Louise had lifted her lovely pointed chin. She looked full at her aunt, her eyes level, assured, faintly amused.

"I signed a three years' contract after rehearsal this afternoon," she said clearly. "You seem to forget that I was eighteen last month."

There was a moment of utter, blank silence. Then the girl turned swiftly and picked up an orchid gown from the back of a chair. She shook out its filmy folds with a careful hand.

"There's no use in discussing it, Aunt Beverly. You know how I dislike unpleasant scenes, and I shall never change my mind. I want to sing and dance and live in luxury. Of course, I shall never forget what you have done for me since I was a mere baby. I shall make it up to you in a thousand ways, dearest; but stay here in this narrow, insular town and teach—never! Shall we go out and see the end of the play, Aunt Beverly?"

"No," said Miss Page dully. "I'm going home. My head aches."

"Too bad!" cooed Marie Louise, shaking her white shoulders clear of the green swathings. "Try camphor. Mrs. Hilliard thinks it so good. I'll be home after the dance—my last dance in this stupid little town! Don't wait up with your poor head. Night night, dear, dear Aunt Beverly!"

IV

Out in the intense cold of the December night, Miss Page's numbed brain began to clear. At the junction of Main and Forest Streets she paused and tapped a neat foot on the icy curb. Anger was mounting within her—anger, and a queer feeling of desolation, against which she fought even more angrily.

"Dismissed!" she reflected stormily. "Dismissed like a naughty child! 'Run along home, dearest aunty, and fuss with your foolish headache. Old maids mustn't be out late!' And that old fool of a Rhuey! Utterly lost to shame! A dead set at the iceman! Wants to come first with somebody before she dies! I wonder who you come first with, Miss Beverly Page! And that child! She is of the world, he said, and he is right. I saw it clearly. The world will never hurt her. He is right, that grave, cold man, and I've shut my eyes to it for eighteen years! I've a good mind to go down to the church and make a dead set at the dominie, with his three snuffly children and his leaky parsonage, this very minute. It's either that or a cat and a parrot!"

She turned flashing eyes toward the church. One feeble ray of light flickered there, and suddenly she remembered. The Christmas greens—and every last member of the committee up at the High School play!

"The poor little man!" she murmured remorsefully. "Struggling all alone with those hateful, prickly things! He can't help having hay fever every August, I suppose, and getting egg on his necktie; but he could help the brown derby and the cloth-topped button boots. No, little man, I can't marry you, but I will help you with those greens. It must be half past ten, but I guess my spotless reputation will stand it somehow."

The Rev. Milo Greene was pathetically glad to see her. He pressed running pine and holly into her deft hands, sniffling thankfully, for the cold church had intensified the perpetual cold in his head. Between snuffles he told her that it was most distressing that the High School play should have conflicted with the Christmas work, but he blamed no one for not coming to help—dear me, no!

His children were in bed with heavy colds. So distressing, just at the Christmas season, didn't Miss Page think so? The boiler had burst again, and the cellar was flooded, so that the furnace had taken French leave and gone out. Ha! Ha! Get it, Miss Page? Joking aside, it was really most distressing in this cold weather.

Another branch of holly there? Yes, a very good effect, Miss Page, indeed! He trusted Miss Page would have a very pleasant Christmas recess. The dear children were most charming, but a care—a care! Would Miss Page kindly put the large star in the exact center of the arch, and would she mind being left for just a few moments while he took a peep at the poor children? He had a helper in the north gallery somewhere, tying ropes of pine to the organ pillars. If Miss Page needed help—

Miss Page glanced over her capable shoulder toward the north gallery, heard not a sound, concluded grimly that the helper had been talked to death, and mounted the tallest stepladder to its very top.

Patent leather pumps, worn in anticipation of doing the flappers out of a dance or so even at the extreme age of thirty-two, are delightful to look upon, but hardly the most appropriate footwear for climbing stepladders. Firmly clutching the large star of holly and mistletoe, Beverly reached for the exact center of the arch, turned a slender ankle, lost her balance, and went ignominiously down into a pair of extremely well muscled arms clad in Scotch tweed.

"Hurt?" breathed an anxious voice.

Miss Page was painfully hurt. Red-hot pitchforks were jabbing into her ankle. She kept her eyes shut to keep the tears back, and clutched hard at the Scotch tweed shoulder.

"If I should swear, would you mind?" she said, with a catch in her breath. "I'd rather do it than weep all over you. Can't you put me down somewhere?"

With about as much apparent effort as if they were carrying a small child, the Scotch tweed arms conveyed her to the dim light of the amen corner.

"Considering," murmured a deep, pleasant voice in Miss Page's ear, "that I have waited fifteen endless years to have you where you are now, I really couldn't!"

And the owner of the arms and the voice sat down with the superior and dignified Miss Page upon his knees. In a church, mind you! Where, oh, where were the taxpayers who would have been so highly edified at the shocking spectacle? Where, oh, where was Mr. Cephas Doolittle, who had observed that Miss Page was "too derned particular"?

For Beverly Page merely opened her eyes and said a perfectly banal thing—a thing which any ordinary woman might have said:

"Wha-what do you mean?"

A large but very gentle hand slipped the pump from a silk-clad ankle, which was swelling up like the lady who swallowed separately the blue and the white sections of the Seidlitz powder.

"I mean," said the deep and pleasant voice, "that fifteen years ago I fell in love with you, and I never fell out. We had come here to a choir rehearsal. I sang about as melodiously as a bullfrog, but you were here—the sweetest thing I'd ever seen. You had on a soft white blouse, with a piece of cherry-colored velvet ribbon at the top of it in a modest V. A little curl danced on your white throat just behind your ear. I worshiped it! Once I handed you a hymn book, and my fingers brushed it. I was numb and dumb with the rapture of it; but another chap took you home. Other chaps always took you to places; but I've loved you for fifteen years!"

Indescribable emotions filled the orderly mind of Miss Beverly Page, but anger predominated. She forgot her throbbing ankle in the sudden throbbing of that large ganglion commonly known as the heart.

"Fifteen years! And you've never even looked sidewise at me. I don't believe it! Fifteen years! Why didn't you say so, then?"

"You were the beauty, the courted beauty of the town," he answered gently, still holding her fast. "I was only learning a trade in the factory, and I had a widowed mother to support. The evenings that you spent in dancing I spent in study. Every one said—your mother even said to my mother—that your beauty would marry you to a fortune. What chance had a dull, grave, poor man against the other fellows who swarmed about you — Howe, young Hilliard, Larry Pentacost, Bob Loomis—dozens of rich chaps? I had no chance from the first, but as the years went on, and you didn't marry any of them, I wondered. We were practically strangers after all these years, but I made up my mind, if my chance ever came—"

"Oh!" wailed the indignant lady on his knees. "And you've let me grow into an old maid! I was so desperate with loneliness to-night that I almost made up my mind to marry the minister and those three snuffly children. Yes, I did! Marie Louise is leaving me, and Rhuey is going to make a dead set at Mr. Peters. Oh, how could you be so mean? I've done the most awful things, too. I've dropped parcels at your very feet in the trolleys, but you let some one else pick them up. I've stayed late at parties, but you let some one else take me home. I've even sent you mushy valentines. I've done everything a woman can do, except propose. I think you're mean! When a man loves a woman, she ought to know it right away. To keep still for fifteen years—"

A firm hand suddenly cupped her quivering chin.

"Do you mean," he said unsteadily, "that you, too—"

"That's just what I mean," replied Miss Page shamelessly. "No one else has ever counted a fig. It's been you every single minute of these fifteen years!"

V

A SILENCE which took no note of time or place was presently broken by the deep voice, crisp now, yet with a wondrous tenderness underlying it.

"I suppose it's barbarous taste," he murmured, his lips on her soft hair; "but would you very much mind having cherry-colored hangings in the living room?"

"And cherry-shaded lights would be cheerful," replied the softer voice dreamily. "And in the hall—"

The side door banged. A rush of cold air smote them, and the Rev. Milo Greene hurried in.

"The furnace," he began brightly, "is now drawing well. Ruth and Naomi were sleeping soundly, but I had to stay and rub goose grease into Paul's chest. So distressing, that chest of Paul's! And I think the water has gone down at least two inches in the cellar. How true it is, dear Miss Page, that the Lord looks after His own! I have been a trifle worried about our Christmas repast. A widower is so helpless, dear Miss Page; but it was a folly of which I repent. Our dear sister Skidmore has invited me and my little flock to her holiday table. A noble woman, dear Miss Page! And then these decorations! How foolishly worried I was about them, and how nobly our worthy friend, the superintendent of the cloth factory, came to my aid! At this moment he is doubtless working at the back of the north gallery, getting a thousand needles into his kind hands, even as you, my dear Miss—"

He paused in mid flood of his peroration. His nearsighted eyes had caught sight of the Christmas star, leering drunkenly at him on the central arch with a bad list to starboard.

"My dear Miss Page!"

The Rev. Milo's voice was pained. He was one of those men who part their hair seventy times seven times, if need be, until the parting is on a mathematically exact line with the center of the space between the eyes.

"My dear Miss Page! Our Christmas star! You have erred grievously, my dear young lady! It is quite, quite six and one-half inches from the center of the arch!"

He turned his outraged eyes toward the north gallery.

"Mr. Hardy!" he called, in what he meant to be a tenderly arch tone. "Just look down here, please, and I think you will agree with me that for once in her life this charming young lady has done the wrong thing."

But a second later poor little Mr. Greene got the shock of his placid life, for Jerome Hardy, with a very rosy Miss Page still upon his knees, answered promptly from a seat not three yards away:

"From my point of view, dear sir, she has just done the most blessedly right thing in the world!"

YOUTH SINGS OF AGE

I who am young sometimes awake
To dream awhile in dawn's white hour,
To watch day's scarlet fingers break
Morn's fragile flower.
Thus, I remember, time must break
Youth's transient power.

Love songs are penned in every tongue,
In every tempo, every key;
In gay and pensive strains are sung
Youth's amorous plea;
But, age, no lover's lute is strung
To stir for thee!

And yet more red than dawning glows
The evening sky when sunset-dyed;
The thrush renews at daylight's close
His vocal pride;
And none regrets June's fleet, frail rose
At Christmastide.

I shall not dread thee as the night,
Bewildered, dreads its strange despair,
As some old beauty fears her blight
Of frosty hair;
I glimpse thee bearing gifts, snow white
And silver fair.

So I shall be thy lutanist;
In raptured lay my strings shall thrill
To pace my steps. Then, at the tryst,
My wild heart still,
Thou wilt restore all I have missed,
My dreams fulfill!

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

The Token

THE STORY OF A STRANGE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The House of Peril," etc.

XXIV

PEGGY was on the *qui vive* for a telephone call. She hugged the fond delusion that Furneaux—nice little man that he was—would arrange another dinner at the Ristorante Milano.

She had the sense, or the rare self-restraint, not to attempt any communication with Scotland Yard, but she devoured the late editions of all the evening newspapers. They told her little, however. Lurid headlines reproduced almost every word of the subjoined paragraphs. "Shots outside a Strand cinema"—"Desperadoes in a car"—"Several people killed and wounded"—these and similar captions revealed nothing of the sequel. Indeed, Peggy already knew more than this, for Furneaux's snarl at his two ex-soldier recruits had laid bare to her better informed intelligence the essential fact—namely, that Lefèvre had escaped.

It may well be imagined, therefore, how she outdistanced the house staff when the telephone did finally ring, about half past six. A man's voice asked deferentially for "the Hon. Miss Mainwaring."

"Yes," she said. "Speaking!"

"Were you expecting a call, miss, from any one in particular?"

"Yes—from Captain Linton."

"That's right, miss. I was to be sure and give the message to no one but yourself. I am the hall porter at his club. He told me to say he will be out of town tonight, but will get in touch with you at the earliest possible moment. He wants you not to make any inquiries, but to wait until you hear from him."

"Thank you! I gather that Captain Linton must have been in a great hurry?"

"Yes, miss. He just dashed in, got his bag, gave me your number, and jumped into a waiting car, which went off at once."

"When was this?"

"Not two minutes ago, miss."

"Was he alone?"

"No, miss—two gentlemen were waiting in the car."

"Ah! You saw them, then? Were they a big man and a little one?"

The hall porter took thought. His instructions were quite specific, but this young lady seemed to know a great deal already.

"I'm not so sure—" he began, but Peggy laughed.

"Oh, yes, you are!" she cried. "The big man looked like a breeder of prize cattle, and the little one had a queer, wrinkled face, somewhat on Japanese lines. The big man, of course, was smoking a fat cigar!"

She was almost certain the hall porter scratched his head.

"Well, miss," he admitted, "I must say you've described the gentlemen to a T!"

And that was the extent of the Hon. Peggy's information during many subsequent hours, though she could not guess that it was the big man's big heart which permitted even this tiny rill of truth to reach her. Oddly enough, it was not the literal facts that she found most interesting—it was Linton's evident thoughtfulness in her behalf.

Being an adventurous young person, she would have dashed off to Paddington forthwith had she known whither the three were bound. As matters stood, she dined in solitary state, chatted agreeably with the policemen who came on guard that night, and slept the sleep of weariness and good health.

The materials for a meal were placed on the special train at Paddington Station, and

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Linton took his cue from his companions, who uttered not a word as to their mission. Indeed, Winter and Furneaux engaged in a furious argument concerning the relative merits of the Yorkshire and Surrey cricket teams, the chief holding that the champion county had phenomenal luck just when that prime factor in human affairs was most needed.

Linton thought he might calm the troubled waters by introducing a kindred topic.

"When the American army came to France," he said, "I was appointed an instructor in bombing practice to a regiment from the Middle West. The officers and men were quite keen, and one of the first questions they put was whether the overarm action of the bowler in cricket or the round-arm throw of the pitcher in baseball was found the more efficient. I was supposed to be able to decide the point, since our Canadians played the American national game."

His well meant intervention was received in sulky silence. The old-time rivalry of Yorkshire and Surrey might not be thrust aside so easily; so he, too, said nothing more.

"Well!" snapped Furneaux, when the pause became intolerable. "What's the answer?"

"I don't know," said Linton. "I got out of the difficulty by suggesting that my hearers might propound the problem in the first canteen they entered where players of both games were about equally divided, and they would see the finest row any provost marshal ever dreamed of."

Winter nipped the end off his first after-dinner cigar. The mere action helped to restore his good humor.

"When all is said and done," he remarked judicially, "luck cannot last forever. M. Raoul David has had more than his fair share of it. A scientific disquisition by a Home Office expert saved him today from the attendance of half a dozen police motor cyclists, and then we had him for a certainty."

"The ball is in play," cackled Furneaux, "and it doesn't matter a pin whether you hit it with a bat or a club. Smite, Linton!"

"I admit I don't quite see why we are rushing west at sixty miles an hour," was the modest reply.

"Nor did I, till our diminutive friend persuaded me," agreed Winter, whose cigar was now drawing perfectly. "For all that, I believe he is right. M. Raoul David rests under no delusions to-night. He is aware that the chase is too hot, and his main object in life at this moment is to cover up his tracks. The destruction of the storage warehouse in South London may or may not have been an accident. In any event, he knows that we must read into it the removal of a depot. To-day's affair at the cinema has dissipated the last shred of doubt in his mind. He is now hurrying to Devonshire by car. Indeed, only a few minutes ago, Sheldon phoned the information that he passed through Guildford at six o'clock. Unless we can circumvent him before daybreak, the Exmoor factory of Peat and By-Products Low Temperature Distillers, Limited, will go skyward in a cloud of smoke and dust. After that he means to lie low for a time, and trust to the fatuous inertia of the British government and its effete police system to enable him to make a fresh start elsewhere. That is the way a criminal lunatic always reasons. Furneaux is my authority, and he knows. But for the grace of God, he would be one himself!"

"Yorkshire—" began Furneaux.

"No, we are now discussing Devonshire," interrupted Winter doggedly. "Go ahead, Linton! What's troubling you?"

"Five tons of cocaine a day, sir! That strikes me as something abnormal, outrageous, almost ridiculous."

"Why? I spoke only of capacity. It has not been reached yet. The works are capable of it—that is all. They can attain it at the word of command. Meanwhile, the greater part of the output is commercially legitimate. Let me explain. The Exmoor plant is a known thing, and we possess full details. Bonecourt surface combination gas-fired steam boilers cannot be erected without some one being aware of the fact, even though they require neither elaborate foundations nor smokestacks. Condensed water from steam is used for bringing the ammonium carbonate into solution. This is done in large concrete tanks, and the mysterious catalyst dye is added. A total area of ten thousand square feet is provided, as well as a Kestner vacuum evaporator for dealing with about two hundred tons of liquor daily. A number of sheds cover operations for filtering, crystallization, and the rest. Only a small quantity of the catalyst dye is needed, and David prepares that in a laboratory open to himself alone. That is where the 'by-products of peat' notion comes in useful. Who is to define the limits of by-products nowadays? The scheme is almost perfect —almost, but not quite. He had to depend on human agency, and that is where he fell down. We wouldn't have heard a thing about it if Miss Mainwaring hadn't discovered that marked half crown and met you."

"Yet in a few hours you have secured all this knowledge of an abstruse scientific theory?" cried Linton.

"Ah, my boy!" laughed the chief. "You have little experience of analytical chemists. Give them the smallest bone of fact, and they'll build you a fully equipped factory over it. That easy-going fellow in the Home Office is prepared now to discuss the whole process with David himself. Listen to this!"

Winter took from a pocket the typed document which he produced but did not read during the latest conference at Scotland Yard.

"Here is the complete system set forth in chapter and verse:

"First, obtain pure condensed water from the evaporator.

"Second, dissolve in a tank, with a six hours' capacity, the necessary amount of ammonium carbonate crystals with the condensed water. Stir in the unknown catalyst dye material.

"Third, pump the colored liquor into an elevated feed tank.

"Fourth, allow the liquor to run continuously but very slowly down inclined slabs exposed to sunlight, and collect in a storage tank. The absorbed light from the sunlight produces some formaldehyde. The mysterious catalyst turns the solution of the salts to the cocaine instead of the conine salt.

"Fifth, pump the liquor into a series of steam-heated evaporators of the Kestner vacuum type.

"Sixth, run the concentrated liquor into a suitable mixing tank. Add dilute acid, mix, and run off into salting out tanks.

"Seventh, filter the precipitated salts in a washing filter press.

"Eighth, decompose the resultant salts in a tank with ammonia solution, and obtain the crude cocaine.

"Ninth, recrystallize the crude cocaine from the water by dissolving in a steam-heated tank.

"Tenth, run into a cooling tank.

"Eleventh, filter out the recrystallized cocaine.

"There you have it," added Winter. "I don't pretend to understand why, but our Home Office analyst regards the whole thing as akin to making butter out of cream."

"Is a large staff employed at the Exmoor plant?" Linton inquired.

"About sixty men in the actual works, not counting carters and laborers. It is evident that the local Inland Revenue authorities know nothing of the cocaine product. They are interested mainly in the financial results, and were persuaded last year that the distillation plant had nothing to do with dutiable alcohol. The food preservative part of the scheme guarded the secret admirably."

"Has this cocaine been placed on the market?"

"No. The preliminary advertising matter is ready, and has a most plausible sound. David claims that the stuff prevents fermentation, which is the basic principle of decomposition. Before many months we might all be swallowing his drug in milk, butter, cheese, meat, fish, bacon, jam—nearly everything, in fact, capable of absorbing it."

Taunton was the first stop. Here the special train changed engines, and a local police officer brought to the saloon a long telephone message from headquarters in Devonshire, where preparations were in hand to meet the very urgent request for help telegraphed by Sir Arthur Monson. It was then a quarter to ten in the evening, and the party was *en route* again before ten o'clock.

Sheldon had also telephoned, to say that David's chauffeur had taken the opportunity to slip away when the car stopped for petrol at a West London garage. The man had surrendered himself voluntarily, but professed that he knew little or nothing of his employer's business.

This was the first point discussed as the train sped westward again.

"Mr. Sheldon evidently did not ascertain who took the wheel subsequently," commented Linton.

"You may be sure the chauffeur vanished into back streets as quickly as his leggings would allow him to move," said Furneaux. "Of course, he might have died unexpectedly somewhere on Exmoor about dawn to-morrow, but I wish he had stuck to his job. David will now have the wind up properly."

"These fellows should be treated like so many mad dogs," said Winter sternly. "Their car should be halted with a jerk, and a volley poured into them before they can lift a weapon. Yet what can we do? What a howl will go up in Parliament if we arrange a Sinn Fein ambush!"

"See that your first wires are high enough, and there should be little difficulty," suggested Linton.

"How do you mean?"

"Smash the wind screen before the wheels meet any resistance. We shall be ready — they cannot possibly be. Let a man on each side of the road thrust a heavy carriage rug or piece of tarpaulin through the windows. In such conditions any shooting they may attempt will fly wild."

"That is what I may describe as the soldierly method," smiled Winter; "but I am anxious to catch this chap alive, so—"

"You're wrong," declared Furneaux emphatically. "How do you know for certain that we can hang him? I, for one, shan't sleep soundly until David is dead. He is an evil influence — a deadly germ which cannot be confined by the walls of any jail, be they of triple brass and many cubits high. I suppose I can't bring myself to shoot him in cold blood, but he won't have to crook his elbow before I let him have one in the right place!"

"You bloodthirsty little ruffian!" muttered the chief. He turned to Linton. "It 'll be a nice kettle of fish, won't it, if we have to bring Furneaux back to town heavily manacled?"

"Better that than for us to bring you back in a coffin, you big stiff!" growled Furneaux, who seemed strangely ill at ease.

Winter did not reply. He took out a notebook, and, after consulting a railway guide, jotted down some figures. Then Furneaux grimaced with just a spice of his wonted sardonic humor.

"Barring road accidents, David will reach the gates of his factory about five o'clock in the morning," he announced. "He cannot possibly be there before four. That gives him eleven clear hours, but the Exmoor roads will cost him another hour."

"You are very confident that he really is making his way here," Linton could not help saying.

"Where else is he to go? The Exmoor plant is the nerve center of his project. All he wants now is to destroy it. From his point of view, even after the defection of the chauffeur—who didn't know where the car was going, or Sheldon would have told us—the circumstances favor him. Put yourself in his place. He left London in an uproar. The police are supposed to be rushing about from Russell Square to various addresses and night clubs where they might stumble across him or some of his dupes. He assumes by this time that we know nothing of the Peat and By-Products concern, or an attempt would be made to arrest him on the road, and woe betide any unfortunate bobbies who tried to stop his car at a town *en route!* No, sir—every mile restores his confidence. He is almost sure, now, that he can reach the factory unhindered. He expects to have a few hours to spare for the complete destruction of the works, and for his own escape. Unless the sun doesn't rise again—in which case none of us will have any further interest in life—M. David will meet us on Exmoor about five o'clock to-morrow morning!"

XXV

The train drew up quietly at a wayside station in a North Devon valley, deposited its passengers on the platform, and departed forthwith for Barnstaple. A number of men were in waiting. Their leader, a county superintendent of police, made himself known.

"Twenty picked constables, all well armed, with six motor bicyclists among them, will rendezvous at two o'clock within a mile of the peat factory," he explained. "Work begins there at seven, and the employees have breakfast in a mess room at half past eight. I think I ought to warn you that Mr. Thomas is highly popular. He is generous and—"

"Mr. Thomas?" interrupted Winter.

"Yes—the consulting chemist who comes here occasionally from London."

"Do you know him personally?"

"No, but the local constable is well acquainted with him."

"Is that man here?"

"Yes."

"Will you bring him forward?"

It was quite dark in the shadow of the station buildings, but in response to a name a figure detached itself from the dimly seen group.

"Can you describe Mr. Thomas?" said Winter.

The man was taken somewhat aback, since a verbal picture of any person, if it is to be accurate and recognizable, demands long training coupled with unusually close observation.

"Well, sir," he began, "he's a pleasant-spoken gentleman of about fifty, five feet nine inches in height, of slight but active build and pale complexion, with brown eyes and a short beard!"

"Capital! Has he a domed forehead, a hooked nose, a receding chin, with a bird-like cast of feature, and does he speak with a thin, reedy voice?"

"That's him exactly, sir."

Winter sighed his relief. He would have very much disliked any further complications in regard to the identity of M. Raoul David.

"By the way, this constable obtained an item of news which may be of value," said the local superintendent. "Mr. Thomas has instructed a man in the neighboring village, whom he employs as a messenger when visiting the factory, to await him in the village street to-morrow morning at a quarter to five o'clock."

"How did you hear this?" said Winter, turning to the policeman again, and ignoring a slight cough from Furneaux.

"Hicks told me himself, sir," was the answer. "He got a telegram from London, which he showed me."

"Does Hicks know why he is wanted?"

"He has no notion, sir."

"And where is Hicks now?" inquired Furneaux.

"In bed, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"I passed his house after supper, and he was in his bedroom. I heard him winding an alarm clock."

"Is he likely to have noticed the presence of extra police in the place, or strange cars, or would he be told of the coming of a special train from London?"

"He couldn't very well be aware of any of those things, sir, because I didn't know them myself then."

As a matter of fact, Furneaux had instantly reached a correct conclusion as to Hicks and the telegram. David was anxious to get information from the man on practically the identical points raised by the detective.

"How far distant is the factory?" went on Winter.

"About two miles, uphill, and a bad road. It will take us at least fifteen minutes, for we must drive carefully," said the superintendent.

"Have you cars enough to seat all of us?" asked Winter.

"Oh, yes. I left them on a common outside the village, which we can reach by a footpath, thus avoiding the houses."

"That is first-rate! Now I would like to meet the squad you spoke of. In this affair every man must understand exactly how important his duties are. Any failure may cause a national disaster."

The superintendent whistled softly.

"Is Mr. Thomas connected with the outrages reported in the newspapers to-day?" he asked.

"Yes—he is the most dangerous criminal now alive."

"Well," said the other, "I've done a bit of guessing since the chief constable sent for me this evening, but I couldn't credit my own thoughts. Dash it all! Three weeks ago this very man gave a prize of five pounds for the finest baby born in the village during 1921!"

Soon after two o'clock Winter addressed a gathering of some twenty-five officers and men of the Devon County Constabulary, and told them a story which none of them will forget till memory itself is dead. The dramatic surroundings of the scene lent an element of weird tragedy to the strange things he said. The contingent was drawn up in a narrow valley choked with trees, and, as no lights were shown, it was impossible to discern the form or features of any individual. There was a voice addressing a collective ear, and that was all.

The chief spoke slowly, and every word told. No muttered instructions in a front line trench for a midnight raid on the enemy had ever sounded half so thrilling, Linton thought. There, at any rate, soldiers were about to attack an alert and well armed foe; but the forces at war with law and order in that remote part of rural England were vague, sinister, almost diabolical in their design to crush out of existence all that mankind had achieved during countless centuries of gradually successful effort.

The darkness seemed to be full of impalpable beings, evil, menacing, ready to leap unseen barriers in order to wreak some sort of elfin vengeance on helpless humanity. Even the stolid and solid country policemen were not immune from some such fanciful notions. Although conversation was forbidden when the little column moved in file along a moor road, Linton heard one man whisper to another:

"By gum, I'm glad we're out of that wood! While that chap from London was talkin', I expected every minute that some rotten thing like a seven-foot ape would spring at me from behind!"

"Something ran up my leg. I think it was a field mouse," said his companion. "I tell you I nearly roared 'Murder!'"

A brisk tramp uphill dispelled these vapors. Winter, after consulting with his colleagues and the local superintendent, decided to occupy the works and endeavor to arrange matters so that David's car would pass through the main gateway, and its occupants be permitted to alight, before they had the least ground for suspicion that life on Exmoor that morning was not running in its normal grooves.

The residential part of the premises was inhabited by a manager, four engineers, and two night watchmen. Among other duties, the latter looked after the furnaces. There was no telephone, but so much business was transacted by telegraph that the post office had installed an additional wire on the local line, and had stationed an experienced operator in the village.

Quite recently the resident staff had erected a wireless outfit, with which they could pick up messages from neighboring broadcasting centers; but Winter discounted this appliance as being of no value, because Sheldon would so arrange matters with the authorities that no extraneous communication could get through.

It was evident, however, from the surprise and excitement caused by the arrival of a strong body of police at the gates, before dawn, that the resident manager had received no prior warning of the possibility of any unusual occurrence. At first, he was inclined to be skeptical and uncommunicative, but he came to his senses speedily when he learned the identity of the men in charge of the raid.

He showed a telegram which announced that Mr. Thomas would be at the works about five o'clock, and admitted that he and others connected with the company were aware that the name was a *nom de guerre* adopted by the famous Polish-French chemist, M. Raoul David.

"Why should he find it necessary to use an alias?" inquired Winter.

The manager, a sharp-eyed little Welshman, laughed at this.

"The theory is that M. David is a trifle cracked, sir," he said, "and that would not be the best of recommendations for our chemical products, which are really the most wonderful things in their way yet known to science."

"Are the other members of your staff British—I mean the six men now in the building?"

"Yes, sir."

"Genuine engineers and workingmen?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Kindly summon them to your office. I have little time to spare, so I purpose explaining things to you collectively."

Furneaux took advantage of the interval to whisper in Winter's ear. Whatever the little detective's suggestion was, the chief first disapproved, but was ultimately convinced. Linton, saying nothing, but keeping eyes and ears open, saw that Furneaux drew aside two of the police cyclists, and spoke to them earnestly for many minutes. At half past three the trio went out, and they were not seen again until much later.

At that time dawn was breaking over the heather-clad hills, whose summits were still silhouetted in black against the tender tints of pink and blue and green in the northeast sky. The air was keen and invigorating. A glorious summer day was heralded by the appearance of a few wisps of cloud overhead and by the dense mists rising from the valleys.

All nature was asleep. Hardly a bird was stirring yet. Exmoor wore a mantle of utmost peace, and seemed to smile in placid dreams of bygone ages.

XXVI

In civilized countries it is not the office of the police to execute the dread penalties of the law. Their duty is to arrest criminals and to bring them to trial. If necessary, where outraged public opinion seeks to inflict summary justice, they must protect their prisoners at the risk of their own lives.

In the present instance, greatly as the chief of the C. I. D. would have preferred to safeguard himself and his men by shooting at sight a murder gang which would stop at nothing either to avoid capture or to take vengeance on the representatives of the law, he was obliged to devise measures which would render possible, at least, the capture of its members not only alive but unharmed.

It would serve no good purpose now, however, to describe the plan he adopted. It was defeated ere ever it saw the light, and to this day neither he nor any of his colleagues knows exactly how, or why.

They can hazard shrewd guesses, of course. David, undoubtedly a lunatic, had many sides to his strange nature. The man who could use a snake to terrorize a half conscious maidservant, and yet take an active interest in the well-being of the lusty infants in a Devonshire village—who could apply science both for the benefit of his fellow men and for their wholesale destruction—was obviously endowed with conflicting qualities of head and brain, which influenced those brought in contact with him in accordance with the elements of good or evil they found in him.

Thus, the police, who had taken the full measure of his fiendish intent, knew him to be a homicidal maniac, whereas there could be no question that some among his associates believed he was the prophet of a new evangel, while the men who carried out his technical instructions in the Exmoor factory regarded him as a genius, even if an eccentric one, and philanthropic to the core. Possibly, therefore, Mr. Winter's earnest words fell on more than one pair of unsympathetic ears when he harangued the seven employees of the Peat and By-Products Company as to David's real purposes and methods. It often happens that a supposed benefactor cannot be dethroned thus readily.

A phase of human nature of which Winter momentarily lost sight is that curious feeling of sympathy with the under dog in a struggle between law and criminality—a feeling which is a recognized feature of the average mind all the world over. This strange growth, too, may have borne fruit at a crucial moment. Be that as it may—whether some person signaled a secret warning, or David received a premonition of danger through some occult sense—the fact remains that when his car mounted the hill in broad daylight, about five o'clock, he did an unprecedented thing.

It was not unusual for him to motor from London by night, it seemed. He suffered from sleeplessness, and made no secret of his liking for long journeys over darkened roads, when, he said, his brain became extraordinarily active. It was his habit, as a species of intellectual pastime, to think out problems backward—starting, that is, from the perfect result, reviewing intermediary processes, and making notes of the greater difficulties met in the descent, for careful laboratory experiments later.

The factory gates would not be opened until seven o'clock. As he often arrived much earlier than that, he would sound the motor horn until one or other of the night watchmen appeared, and the car could enter the spacious yard.

On this occasion he acted quite differently. The car was halted fully fifty yards from the entrance. Then it was turned swiftly, and an attendant was summoned by repeated blasts on the horn. There was nothing for it, therefore, but for a man to go out, and ascertain why Mr. Thomas did not follow his customary routine.

David himself was at the wheel.

"Is Mr. Evans up?" he asked sharply, when the watchman hurried forward.

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

It could hardly occur to the man that such a reply must add fuel to the fire of doubt now blazing in a mind quick to detect the least departure from the normal run of things at the works.

"Why? Has he been disturbed by earlier visitors?" came the unexpected demand.

"I believe he had a telegram to say you were coming, sir."

This, in the conditions, was a quick-witted explanation enough.

"Tell him I want to speak with him here," said David. "And close those gates when he comes out."

Evans, the resident manager, being himself a chemist of no mean attainment, was convinced by this time that Winter's astounding statements were true. A hundred minor circumstances leaped to the eye in corroboration, since that which is not even vaguely understandable by ignorance stares at one in the biggest and most legible of type when read by the light of knowledge. When this message reached him, therefore, he rested under no delusions either as to the nature of his employer's present errand or as to the real peril of his own position.

"I think you may lose your bird—for this morning, at any rate—if I go outside, and if the gates are shut," he said hurriedly to Winter. "David is obviously alarmed. At the least sign of interference he will be off. With the almost certain prospect of being shot if I try to mislead him, I admit candidly that I shall most probably blurt out just what he wants to know."

There was so much truth in this contention that the chief had to deal with the problem at once from a new aspect. His men, of course, were ready, and all had bicycles of one type or the other. As soon, therefore, as the manager emerged from the door of the office, apparently in obedience to his employer's request, and was ostensibly making for the gateway, the four motor cyclists dashed out.

Winter's hope was that the mere fact of Evans crossing the courtyard would lull suspicion for just the few seconds needed to bring this front line of the attack so close that both rear tires of the car could be put out of action. Then the men were to diverge to left and right into the heather, which was short, and was worn into many small paths on both sides of the road. The remainder of the cycle squad was to scatter similarly, at least half a dozen trying to pass the car, to meet it with direct volleys if it did not halt at command.

Winter himself assumed the most dangerous post of all. He would challenge David and his companions, and call on them to submit quietly to arrest, though convinced in his own mind that they would do nothing of the sort. Still, *noblesse oblige,* even in the C. I. D. The effort had to be made.

At the last moment, so to speak, Linton murmured so that the chief alone could hear:

"Don't run straight toward the car! Move diagonally!"

Winter realized the value of this sound military advice, which reduced considerably the chance of being hit by antagonists whose nerves would be jarred by sight of so many armed policemen.

Here, again, however, David's promptitude discounted all preconcerted schemes. The instant the four motorists appeared, fire was opened from two automatic pistols through the back window of the car, which had been detached for this very purpose. The shooters had the range, too, and a fairly compact target. One policeman fell, bringing down a comrade as his machine swerved.

The others pressed on gallantly, and began shooting, but the car was in motion now. Nothing but sheer luck could make effective any bullet sent in pursuit, since the men had to guide their machines with one hand over a road hardly fit to ride at the best of times, while endeavoring to use a pistol with the other.

David, too, was familiar with the worst ruts and turns, whereas these were practically unknown to the assailants, who soon suffered more casualties—for the most part, luckily, from collision. Thus, amid a fury of pistol shots, roaring exhausts from engines, and the unmeaning yells by which men try to relieve the strain of intense excitement, the fight passed in a wild scurry over the small plateau which held the factory, and swept confusedly down the hillside to the valley beneath.

This first burst of the tornado began and ended in a few seconds. Winter, Linton, the local superintendent, and the works manager were the only persons on foot. One of the motor cyclists had been shot through the shoulder, and a man who was thrown by the skidding of his machine had broken his left forearm.

Linton saw that one of the cycles was little if any the worse for the mishap, and made up his mind to join in the chase.

"Is there no short cut to the village?" he said.

His calm, unemotional tone acted as a tonic to the excitable Welshman.

"Yes," was the answer. "It bears off to the right by that clump of rocks there, but it is very steep, and only small boys and born idiots ever tackle it on a bicycle."

Linton was off on the instant.

The flying battle was now two hundred yards away. Though he did not know it yet, the path he followed cut off quite four hundred yards of the mile and a quarter which the moorland cartway followed before it joined a properly macadamized road. His project was simplicity itself. If he could head the car, he would throw the heavy motor cycle across the track, seek such cover as offered, and fire aimed shots at the fugitives when their flight was stopped or greatly hindered by the obstacle in their way.

He soon learned, however, that one man had already foreseen not only David's bold attempt to escape, but the only possible manner of it, and had devised an effective and altogether deadly counterstroke.

At a point where the road curved around an almost precipitous hill, with a bold escarpment of rock on one side, and nothing stouter than a post and rails warding passing traffic from a steep slope on the other, Furneaux had stationed his cyclist policemen, with orders to fire without warning at the occupants of the car, if it came back that way. Their machines rested securely behind the large bowlder which sheltered them, while the little man himself took up a similar position some forty yards lower, at the extreme outermost point of the curve.

Linton, racing at breakneck speed across the chord of the arc, reached a point where further progress on an uncontrollable machine meant suicide. He stopped perforce, and was scanning the lie of the land, to determine whether a valiant plunge through the heather might not offer a possible chance of success at a greater distance, when he caught sight of the ambush which had forestalled him.

Realizing that his own attempt was doomed to fail—since no conveyance other than a mule or a hunter trained to negotiate similar country could have brought him in safety to a point where he might intervene effectually—he watched the exciting spectacle staged fully two hundred feet beneath. Indeed, feeling that he might help by distracting David's attention, he showed himself on the skyline, and began shooting at the oncoming car.

Seldom, even in his all-round experience of exciting episodes in the war zone on the Western Front, had Linton been privileged to watch such a sharp and thrilling fight as that which now enlivened this slope of placid Exmoor. The prone figures of Furneaux and the two policemen, the racing automobile, the pursuing mob of two motor cycles and some dozen cyclist police, the rapid narrowing of the terrain occupied by the small waylaying force and the fast-moving battle—these things were of the very essence of dramatic action.

Whether or not his own shots turned the scale in the least degree he could never determine subsequently; but what did happen was this—when his third or fourth bullet, carefully aimed, went whining at the car, Furneaux's assistants joined in. At the range, and in the circumstances, these latter could hardly miss their target. The stout glass of the wind screen was shattered into fragments.

Almost simultaneously, the car smashed into the face of the rock on which the policemen were stretched. Thence it rebounded into the fence on the opposite side of the road, and plunged headlong down the cliff, turning over twice ere it struck a tree some sixty feet below. Then there was an explosion of the sort which the ears of three men present on that bleak moorland recognized—a rending, blinding crash which tore a powerful structure of steel into fragments and rendered impossible even the identification of the three human beings thus effectually blotted out of existence.

Leaving his cycle where it stood, Linton raced down a steep path to join Furneaux, whom he found removing some large stones arranged on the near side of the road in such wise that the off fore wheel of the car must have struck them had it reached that point.

" I left nothing to chance," said the little man coolly. " Those blighters might have dodged the bullets; they simply could not have cleared *that* little obstacle. Still, I'm glad they went over a few yards away. It was a more sporting finish. But, *nom d'un nom,* where did *you* come from?"

Linton explained. Furneaux laughed cheerfully.

" You sent a cold chill down my spine," he cackled. " I heard your automatic, and I thought David had stolen a march on us by planting reënforcements on the hillside. Ah, here is Winter, running magnificently! Bet you a new hat he won't light a cigar for five minutes by the clock!"

Linton, watching the most notable sprint in which the chief had indulged during many years, did not take the bet, which he would have lost, for Winter had neither time nor breath even to think of his cherished Havanas during the next half hour.

The chief had much to occupy his mind. When certain notebooks, purses, watches, and other trinkets had been picked up, the local police were left to collect such fragments of bodies and clothing as remained. The detectives were now anxious to examine the factory, especially David's private laboratory, which they would then seal and hand over to the safe custody of the local officials until the Home Office experts could go through its contents at leisure.

Mr. Evans, meanwhile, had been thinking hard. It must be remembered that he, too, by reason of his profession, had the trained mind of the scientist. He absolutely vetoed the notion of forcing the door of the laboratory, or even of trying to open it with one of a bunch of keys which had been found near the scene of the explosion.

" Thomas—or David, as I ought to describe him now—used to enter that room in a peculiar way," he said. " He would never allow me to accompany him when he went there, but one day, by chance, unknown to him, I happened to go up the stairs leading to the corridor in which it is situated, and I saw him fumbling with his left hand, apparently against the interior wall, when the door was open only a few inches. I am acquainted with no explosive quite so powerful as that which has destroyed this car and its occupants, and it occurs to me that he effectually provided against any prying into his secrets during his absence. The place has three large windows, which can be reached by a ladder. I take it you gentlemen will not deny me the right to find a way in, and to incur such risk as may be necessary. In a sense, I was the man's accomplice. It is only fair that I should prove that my coöperation with him was an innocent one."

It was evident that the Welsh manager felt his position keenly. Winter approved of his plan, and went so far as to order all others to clear out of the building to a safe distance when the ladder was adjusted in accordance with Evans's directions.

They watched him mount it and peer in through a window. Then he came down to secure a chisel and saw. After removing two fairly large panes of glass, he cut away the center beading, but did not attempt to raise the sash. Climbing inside, he disappeared, and some minutes elapsed before he showed up again.

"You can get in by the stairs now," he said. "The door is open. One of those keys fitted the lock."

Four men trooped up. Three among them understood at a glance the nature of the thin wires which Evans had disconnected from the door and from each of the window sashes.

"I don't know where they lead yet," he said, in an awed whisper. "If you gentlemen are not up to these dodges, I strongly recommend you not to make any further search, but to leave this place to those whose business it is to inquire into such matters."

They took his advice. A week later, a man from the Home Office reported that the wires connected with detonating devices similar to the one that Furneaux found in the machinery of the Ford car at Avenue House, Dorking. Any one of these would have fired a large quantity of David's explosive, packed in a locked cellar in the basement. Thus, even at the twelfth hour, he was cheated of the vengeance he meant to wreak on his captors.

Given such extraordinary conditions, Winter thought he was justified in taking the special train back to London, where he and his two companions arrived about three o'clock in the afternoon. Sir Arthur Monson was in such a hurry to rush to the chief superintendent's room, when told of his presence, that he upset the contents of a large and well filled inkstand over an otherwise spotless table.

Scotland Yard's first and most urgent task, now, was to deal with the press, and the commissioner himself undertook it. Confidential representations to editors and the heads of the chief news agencies secured the desired end. David and his conspiracy against the general weal were whittled down into a mere struggle between the police and a gang of motor banditti. A sensational scandal in the highest boxing circles snuffed it out of existence in a couple of days.

XXVII

The Hon. Peggy Mainwaring seemed to be subdued in tone when her latest admirer told her over the phone how David and his principal henchmen had fared. She was somewhat tongue-tied and distrait, and Linton jumped to the conclusion that the stress of recent events had proved too much for her. Of course, if he lives another fifty years, he may come to understand that when a man believes he has sensed the cause of any tumult raging in a woman's heart, that man is invariably wrong.

Next morning he reported at Scotland Yard, with the intention of returning to his ordinary duties. Furneaux received him at once, the chief being absent.

"Well," said the little man cheerily, "what d'ye think of us now? An effete and pampered lot, aren't we?"

"You know best," countered Linton. "That is not the view I have formed during my few hours of service with your crowd. How are all our fellows who were wounded?"

"Doing well. There are no half measures about the average cop. He has either to be killed outright, or he refuses even to remain in bed. You see, he is extraordinarily fit. Plenty of healthy exercise, and no brain work. Look at Winter!"

"Made many arrests in London?"

"Over twenty. We are now playing the great game of finding the missing numbers. It's just like a jig saw puzzle. It is odd, though, what poor human material M. David used. Just shows what one genius of warped intelligence, plus plenty of money, can achieve. Remove both, and the whole show collapses. That woman, Erminia Schwartz, threw up her hands when the female searcher at Bow Street found a crescent-shaped mole on her shoulder. She has told us all she knows, her sole anxiety being that she shall not be sent to France. Where do you think she and the others made for when they blew up Avenue House?"

"I haven't the least notion."

"Walked across the hill to a cottage in the outskirts of Reigate. They followed field paths the whole way, and only crossed one road."

"Then, if I had gone after them that night—"

"You would now be dead as a red herring. MacDermott is a wise old bird, and knew what he was doing in preventing you from being uselessly butchered. Three times on the way they waited behind trees in case they were being pursued, and that younger fellow, Schwartz, who seldom left his chief, was a noted shot with an automatic. Another marksman was named Bauer. Probably it was he who winged the first of the stout-hearted Devons."

"I must apologize to my esteemed superintendent. I was very angry with him at the moment. Have you found out why those rascals blew up the storage warehouse in London?"

"The woman says—and I see no reason for disbelieving her—that the place was their principal storehouse for the drug which David discovered and was supplying freely to all applicants. It was a highly concentrated product— one grain as potent as ten of morphia — and the trunks that held their stock, as a sort of reserve in case the Devonshire manufactory had to be closed, were protected by locks which, if tampered with, operated a bomb. The feasible explanation is that one or both of the caretakers was gratifying a natural curiosity as to why these particular trunks were visited periodically."

"How is Blenkey?"

"He was not detained. Merely a flesh wound."

"Shall I be wanted to give evidence against Schwartz?"

"No—he goes to Paris. We want no communistic row here."

"Then please convey my kind regards to Mr. Winter and Mr. Sheldon. I'm off to Dorking."

"What's the hurry?"

"You don't need my services further, I take it."

"Going to say good-by to Miss Peggy, I suppose?"

"No—I really don't wish to see her again."

"Don't be a perfect idiot! Her father is Home Secretary, and he owes you some help when you apply for that chief constableship. At any rate, ring up now, and bid his daughter a graceful farewell."

Linton thought it would be churlish to refuse, and Furneaux indulged in weird grimaces when he heard the young man being pressed to come and lunch at Curzon Street, on the ground that Lord and Lady Copmanthorpe were anxious to meet him, in order to learn the story of the past few days from the lips of one who took such a prominent part in all these astounding incidents. Of course, it was practically impossible to refuse such an invitation, so Linton expressed himself as delighted to accept.

"You look it!" chirped Furneaux, when the receiver was hung up. "What's the matter? Don't you like her any longer?"

"She is the most charming girl I ever met."

"'Nuff said! Sail right in, and cut out Bobby Ferris!"

Linton rose with a laugh.

"You forget that I am only an ordinary bobby," he said. "Now, if I were a real, live detective—"

Linton enjoyed the luncheon, however. After father and mother had been properly horrified at their daughter's folly in taking a day's bicycling holiday alone, they listened with tense interest to Linton's recital of his adventures. In fact, Lord Copmanthorpe said such nice things about the young man's services to the nation that it really seemed as if he might look forward to a post a good deal higher than any that could be offered by a county.

Nevertheless, back he went to Dorking, to pass a few instructive days with the Home Office expert who searched the ruins of Avenue House for further traces of David's system of manufacturing cocaine, since investigation in Devonshire showed that some part of the process was carried on elsewhere.

Fred Blenkey, solaced with a handsome donation as a recompense for his wound, decided that Monica Jackson's health could be most speedily restored if she married him when convalescent. The lady was willing, and she herself received a check from the Home Office.

Furneaux's analysis of her ordeal on that fateful night was correct in every detail. She will dread snakes all her life. She cannot bear even to look at eels in a fishmonger's shop.

Jenks became a recruit for the Metropolitan Police. He knows now that orders must be obeyed literally.

Linton was made an acting superintendent in July, and granted a fortnight's special leave. On his first day in London he met Lord Robert Ferris, who was quite cordial, took him to Hurlingham, and introduced him to Lady Ursula Waneham, a sprightly young person whom the guardsman admired immensely, and by no means secretly.

"But," said Linton, whose heart was beating a trifle faster than usual, "I had a sort of impression that you and the Hon. Peggy—"

"Well, yes," said the other, with a sheepish smile. "I was badly smitten there, I admit, but she chucked me so emphatically that day after the cinema show that I couldn't but take no for an answer."

"Do you mean to say you proposed then?"

"No better time, I thought. Tears and timidity, and that sort of thing, you know. By Jove, wasn't I the mistaken lad? Told me she would rather grow apples in Vancouver than settle down to the vapid life of London. What the blazes put Vancouver and apples into her head I can't imagine. And why is life here vapid? She must have meant 'rapid'—eh, what?"

Cabinet changes were imminent, and the Home Secretaryship was going back to the House of Commons, so Lord Copmanthorpe and his family were detained in town. When Linton called at Curzon Street, one member of the household greeted him rather frigidly; but he took heart of grace, and persevered.

Early in 1923, two leading lights of the Criminal Investigation Department were bidden to attend a certain smart wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square, followed by a reception at the Curzon Street residence of the bride's parents.

"So that's that," commented Mr. Winter, blowing a cloud of smoke at the invitation card. "The handsome young sergeant marries the superior housemaid after all. Frog, my boy, you'll be stepping off yourself one of these days!"

Furneaux tried to look downcast.

"No respectable girl of my acquaintance would marry me while I belong to the C. I. D.," he said bitterly. "It's a frightful occupation; and look at the pay! I'd earn some real money running about with dishes in Pucci's café."

"Ah, that reminds me!" said the chief. "We're dining there with Linton and MacDermott on Thursday. See that no sordid crime interferes with that date. Pucci has orders to stage something extra special. It's practically our budding assistant commissioner's last bachelor dinner."

THE END

A DAY ON THE RIVIERA

I'll keep it always for the darker years,
This perfect day beside the sapphire sea;
And if perchance my soul shall never be
So glad again, I'll make it sing to me.

I'll fold it in the dusk of maidenhood,
And leave it hidden like a sacred rose,
Forever fresh in memory that flows,
A vernal stream, through valediction's wood.

And when my heart grows withered with good-by,
And when red years of autumn change to brown,
I'll fasten it in some old wintry gown,
And, fragrant still, its breath will help me die.

Anita Dudley

Homes or "Homes"?

© 1924, M. L. I. CO.

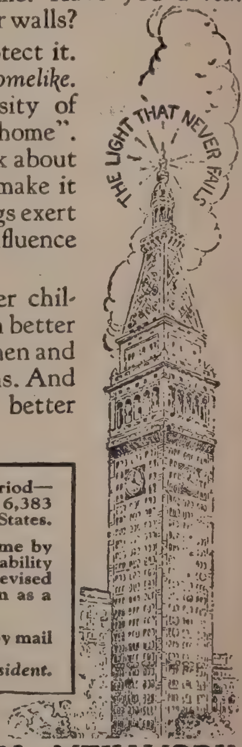
HAVE you ever visited an Old Folks' Home? What a heart-breaking thing it is to see the pitiful attempts of these poor old people to give the few square feet of space they can call their own a touch of the real home they once knew. Not much can be done with only a cot, a bureau and a chair. Yet those who feel the home-hunger try pathetically to make the place seem like home by tacking up a few pictures torn from magazines and by keeping photographs on their bureaus.

And they call such places "homes"! The places where the poor, the sick, the deaf, the blind, the orphans and other public charges are housed. Shelters only—compared with real *homes* such as most of them formerly had.

More real homes and fewer "homes" are what this country needs right now. The welfare of the individual, the family, the nation, the whole world is based upon homes. Civilization itself is founded upon the home. Have you a *real* home or just a roof and four walls?

If you have a home—protect it. Make it permanent and *homelike*. Guard against the necessity of ever seeking shelter in a "home". Look at your home. Think about it. What can you do to make it better? Home surroundings exert such a tremendous influence over family life.

Better homes mean better children. Better children mean better men and women. Better men and women mean better citizens. And better citizens mean a better America.


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

All over the country the movement for better homes is spreading. Corporations and civic bodies have given their aid; magazines and newspapers have given space to this great national movement which works toward better citizenship.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company is heartily in sympathy with these plans to relieve the housing shortage, and to provide happier living conditions. Since June 1920 it has made 24,508 loans on dwellings and apartments, aggregating $171,663,100, that provided accommodations for 49,850 families.

But outside of the Cities? In the same period—since June 1920—the Company made 16,383 loans on farms in twenty-two agricultural States.

To provide against the danger of loss of home by mortgage foreclosure, in case of death or disability of the home owner, the Metropolitan has devised a special form of home protection known as a Mortgage Redemption Policy.

Information regarding it will be furnished by mail on request.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

Published by

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Biggest in the World, More Assets, More Policyholders, More Insurance in force, More new Insurance each year

The Secret of

Clearer skin · Easier digestion · Regular elimination

Better Health

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health is yours once more.*

"When all the other girls were wearing their first low-necked dresses, I was staying at home—all on account of a breaking-out on my back that I simply couldn't get rid of. Dad is a druggist so I tried all the medicated soaps and creams that he had in stock, but finally gave up. It was awful. One day my chum told me about Fleischmann's Yeast and urged me to take it. I took half a cake dissolved in water before every meal—it is not only easy to take but delightful—and in two weeks every trace of the eruption had disappeared. It worked like magic, really, and made me feel like a different person."

(A letter from Miss Esther Shaw of Sanford, Calif.)

"At the age of forty, when I had most at stake, I found myself slipping in health. I was troubled with indigestion, constipation and nervous debility. I had read about people taking Fleischmann's Yeast, and ordered some.

"A while later, in answer to a friend's inquiry, I was surprised to hear myself reply, 'I feel like a prize-fighter' and realized then that I had not felt any sign of indigestion for some time, and was putting in ten to twelve hours' hard brain work daily. I knew I was back again."

(A letter from Mr. W. L. King of Washington, D. C.)

"Came a period of real worry; of haphazard living; of irregular sleep and diet. The result . . . a distressing case of nerves . . . misery from my digestive system, a rough and unclear skin. When someone suggested yeast I laughed. . . . Secretly I tried it, and now, knowing how simple the remedy, I laugh at nerves, scorn a skin that is not smooth and clear, and find my digestive system a thing to be ignored."

(Mrs. Betty Knight of Los Angeles, Calif.)

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain. Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! A few days' supply will keep as well in *your* ice box as in the grocer's. Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-4, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

Robust Men Like

BAKER'S COCOA

The cocoa of high quality

BAKER'S COCOA is invigorating, stimulating only in the sense that pure food is stimulating, it has a delicious flavor and aroma, is a great addition to meals and a wonderful between meals stay.

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

MADE ONLY BY

WALTER BAKER & CO. Ltd.

Established 1780

MILLS AT DORCHESTER, MASS. AND MONTREAL, CANADA

Booklet of Choice Recipes sent free

A Prest-O-Lite Product

WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF ACETYLENE, "THE GAS OF A THOUSAND USES."

—

BATTERIES FOR AUTOMOBILES, FARM LIGHTING, RAILWAY SIGNALS AND RADIO.

Generating Current for Charging Prest-O-Lite Batteries at the Speedway Plant.

Your Car Is No Better Than Its Battery

The Sign of "Friendly Service"

Service Stations Everywhere

That is so evident that it is foolish to take chances by getting a replacement battery that has no earned reputation for dependability—

An unknown battery is just a battery—it brings you no *assurance of performance.*

The name Prest-O-Lite on a battery *means dependability;* it means a battery made by a great organization that has built up a high reputation for integrity of product and character of service.

Prest-O-Lite could not afford to put its name on a faulty product....—which is your assurance of satisfactory performance.

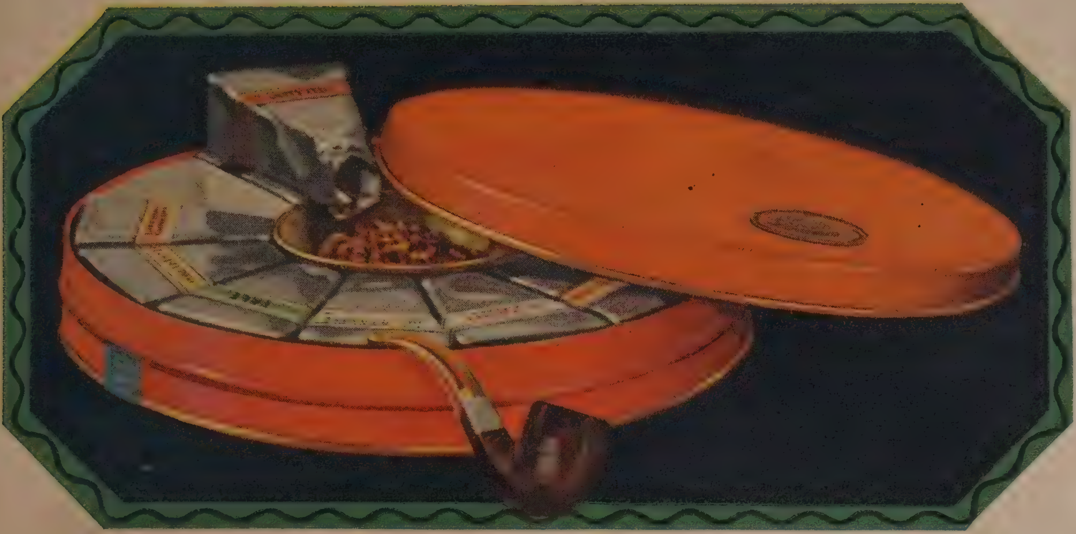
Prest-O-Lite costs no more.

THE PREST-O-LITE COMPANY, Inc.
INDIANAPOLIS, IND.
New York: 30 East 42nd Street
Pacific Coast: 599 Eighth Street, San Francisco
In Canada: Prest-O-Lite Company of Canada, Ltd., Toronto

For your Radio get assured performance in the Prest-O-Lite Radio Battery.

Prest-O-Lite

THE OLDEST SERVICE TO MOTORISTS



Get this, men-

A complete assortment of the world's finest smoking tobaccos — sent to any smoker anywhere — *on 10 days approval*

A new idea for Pipe-Smokers: 12 famous tobaccos, packed in a handsome Humidor—shipped to you direct to help you find the soul-mate for your pipe.

GUARANTEED BY

The American Tobacco Co

MOST men have written their John Hancocks on a lot of "dotted lines." But, if you're a pipe-smoker, we'll wager that you've never signed a fairer, sweeter contract than the little coupon at the bottom of this page.

Just a few strokes of your pen—and you can end your quest of years for a perfect smoking tobacco.

But we are getting ahead of our story.

A Test of the "12 Best" for only $1.50

If you were to try all 12 of these tobaccos in full size packages, the cost would be:

Blue Boar	.25
Capstan	.30
Imperial Cube Cut	.30
Herbert Tareyton	.25
Old English Curve Cut	.15
The Garrick	.30
Carlton Club	.15
Yale Mixture	.25
Falk's Serene Mixture	.15
Three States	.25
Wills' Latakia	.45
Louisiana Perique	.25
Total	$3.05

But through the *Humidor Sampler* you get a liberal "get acquainted" quantity of each for $1.50

The average pipe-smoker is the greatest little experimenter in the world. He's forever trying a "new one," confident that some day he'll find the real affinity for his pipe.

So we created the *Humidor Sampler* to meet his needs.

Into a bright red lacquered humidor case, we have packed an assortment of twelve famous smoking tobaccos—covering the whole range of smoking tobacco taste.

There are myriads of different *brands* of smoking tobaccos on the market. But of them all, there are 12 distinctive blends which, in our opinion, stand in a class by themselves for superlative flavor, aroma and quality.

These twelve decisive blends—the twelve "primary colors" of tobaccos—have been selected for the Humidor Sampler. When you have tried these twelve, you have tried the best; if your tobacco-ideal is to be found anywhere, it must be one of these "Twelve Best."

Ten-Day Approval Offer

We are eager to send the Humidor assortment to any smoker, anywhere, on ten days' approval.

Send no money. Just sign and mail the coupon. That will bring you the Humidor assortment direct from our factories to your den. When the postman brings the package, deposit $1.50 with him, plus postage.

If a ten-day try-out of these tobaccos doesn't give you more real pipe pleasure than you've ever had before, simply return the Humidor, and you'll get your $1.50 and the postage back *pronto*—and pleasantly.

Send No Money—Just Mail Coupon

The American Tobacco Co., Inc., Marburg Branch
Dept. 104, Baltimore, Md.

Please send me, on 10 days' approval, one of your Humidor Samplers of twelve different smoking tobaccos. I will pay postman $1.50 (plus postage) on receipt—with the understanding that if I am not satisfied I may return Humidor in 10 days and you agree to refund $1.50 and postage by return mail.

Name..

Address..

City.. State.........................

Note:—If you expect to be out when postman calls you may enclose $1.50 with coupon and Humidor will be sent to you postpaid.

100 cigarettes for 15¢

GENUINE
BULL DURHAM

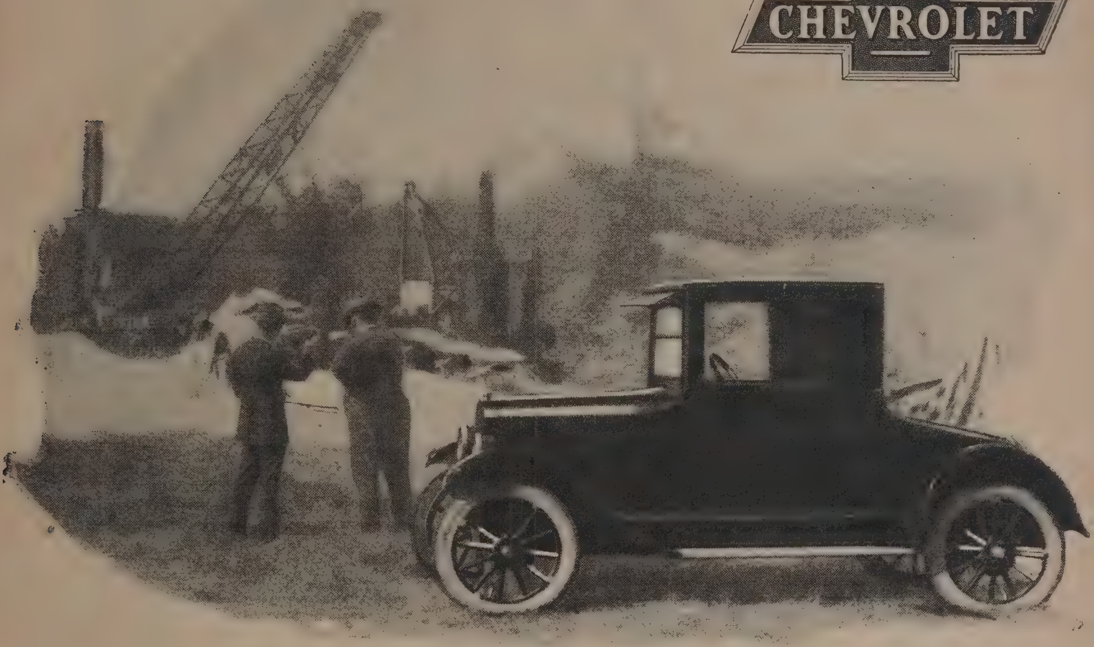
Settle the cigarette question by rolling your own from BULL. You get more flavor, more tobacco taste, more enjoyment — and much more for your money—

2 bags for 15c

Guaranteed by
The American Tobacco Co
INCORPORATED

for Economical Transportation

CHEVROLET



Superior
Utility Coupé

$640

f. o. b. Flint, Mich.

First Aid to Business

The popularity of this car has at all times taxed our large productive capacity.

It meets completely the requirements of most business and professional workers.

The quality of this Chevrolet model is high and along strictly practical lines. The design, construction and finish of the body pleases discriminating motorists, and the economy of operation averages lowest for this type of car.

The mammoth rear compartment is of constant value to all who must carry luggage, equipment, samples, etc.

The best salesmen of this car are the people who use it daily. Ask any Chevrolet dealer, or talk to owners anywhere.

Prices f. o. b. Flint, Mich.

Superior Roadster	$490
Superior Touring	495
Superior Utility Coupe	640
Superior 4-Pass. Coupe	725
Superior Sedan	795
Superior Commercial Chassis	395
Superior Light Delivery	495
Utility Express Truck Chassis	550

Fisher Bodies on closed models

Chevrolet Motor Company, Detroit, Michigan

Division of General Motors Corporation

In Canada—Chevrolet Motor Company of Canada, Limited, Oshawa, Ontario

Five United States manufacturing plants, seven assembly plants, and two Canadian plants give us the largest production capacity in the world for high-grade cars and make possible our low prices.

Chevrolet Dealers and Service Stations everywhere. Applications will be considered from high-grade dealers only, for territory not adequately covered.

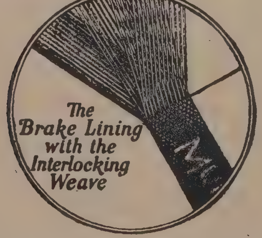
10¢ *brings you an up-to-date* Auto Map

HERE'S an unusual opportunity! By special arrangement with Rand McNally, we can send you, for a limited period only, any one, or all, of their series of Official Auto Trail Maps, covering every state in the country for only 10c apiece. Absolutely up-to-the-minute maps—give trail signs, hotels, garages, service stations and much other valuable touring information. In ordering, please be sure to tell the section of country you want to cover and give us address of shop or dealer where you go to have your brakes relined. Order now as this offer is limited.

MULTIBESTOS

THE BRAKE LINING

with the Interlocking Weave


The Brake Lining with the Interlocking Weave
M

THIS is the famous brake lining that lasts so long. The lining that is specified as factory equipment by a majority of American car manufacturers. And the lining that will give you the feeling of absolute security that your brakes will work whenever you need them.

MULTIBESTOS COMPANY
Dept. A-F-5, Walpole, Mass., U. S. A.

She is No Longer Fat

She found a way to reduce her fat. It was a way far more pleasant than dieting or exercising would have been. This new way allowed her to eat foods without danger of becoming fat again.

She found *Marmola Prescription Tablets.* They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They help Nature to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

Marmola Prescription Tablets are made from the famous Marmola Prescription. Thousands have found that these handy tablets give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

MARMOLA COMPANY
283 Garfield Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

The Test of Donald Norton

by Robert E. Pinkerton

Romance and high adventure—flaming love and daring courage—unswerving fidelity to a great tradition—zealous devotion to a glorious ideal—the clash of primitive passions—all pictured by a master story-teller who uses the snow-swept barrens for his stage. Here is a book that marks high tide in fiction of the great North Woods.

The Test of Donald Norton is a vivid, strong, masterful story—a story that you will long remember.

AT ALL BOOKSTORES—$2.00

Publishers—REILLY & LEE—Chicago

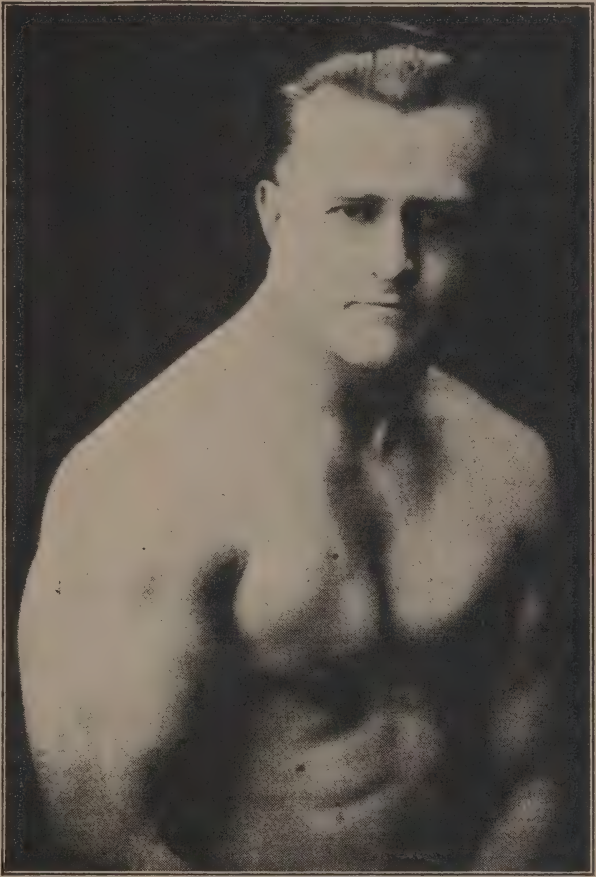
The Muscle Builder

Show me the man who doesn't want muscle, with abounding health, and I'll show you a man who is ready to be measured for a wooden box—he's dead and he doesn't know it. A body without muscle is like a house without foundation—a little storm, and over it goes.

Get wise, fellows, I shouldn't have to tell you these things. You can't enjoy life with a weak, sickly body. There is no pleasure like the feeling of health and strength. And when I say strength, I don't mean any half-way business. Do it right, or forget it.

The Whole Works

I build muscle—good, big solid muscle. Let other fellows knock this idea if they want. I know what I'm doing and I guarantee *you'll like it.* I'll put an arm on you that can be made pliable one second and bulge out hard as steel the next. An arm that will be equally useful in weight lifting and any kind of skilful athletics. Just for a starter, I'll increase the size of that arm at least one full inch in the first 30 days. I'll put a chest on you to be proud of. A full, deep chest with a pair of lungs that will take a man-sized load of rich oxygen with every breath, and you know what that means. Your lungs feed your blood, shooting a kick through your veins that will make you just bubble over with vitality. I will build up those inner muscles around your heart and every vital organ. I will send a thrill up your old spinal column that will make you feel like tackling a wildcat.



EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
America's Leading Authority on Physical Education

A New Body in 90 Days

Some wise crackers say it takes years to put a man in shape. That's because they don't know any better. I want just 90 days and I'll change your body so you won't recognize yourself. By that time every muscle in your anatomy will literally bulge out. And what's more your whole being will just tingle with excitement. You will have a spring to your step and a flash to your eye that will radiate personality wherever you go. You will feel like shouting: "I'm a man—and I can prove it."

Come on now, fellows! Why waste more time? I'm not just promising these things. I guarantee them. If you doubt me, make me prove it. Are you ready? Let's go!

Send for My New 64-Page Book

"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

It is Free

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send today—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN

Dept. 5005, 305 Broadway, New York City

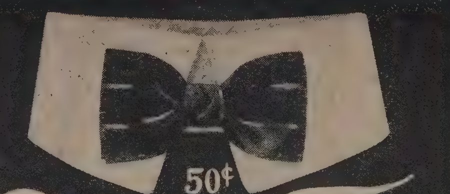
EARLE E. LIEDERMAN,
Dept. 5005, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—I enclose herewith 10 cents, for which you are to send me, without obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name..

Street..

City..........................State................
(Please write or print plainly)



50¢

SpurTie

Pat. June 13, 1922 Reg U.S. Pat. Off.

ALL TIED FOR YOU!

SPRINGTIME means bow time—and here's the Spur Bow, *all tied for you* by hand, chock full of dash, style and quality. Looks self-tied—or better. Holds its jaunty shape all day long, *due to an exclusive patented feature.*

ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES

Be sure you get the genuine. Will not curl, roll or wrinkle. Imitations lack the patented feature.

LOOK FOR THE NAME SPUR ON THE TIE

Write for Style Book C

HEWES & POTTER, Boston, Mass.
Makers of BULL-DOG
Suspenders and Garters, guaranteed 365 days; Bull-Dog Belts and Vestoff Suspenders

On the Pacific Coast
PAUL B. HAY, 120 Battery St., San Francisco, Cal.

$3 DOWN Brings you a Genuine UNDERWOOD TYPEWRITER

10 DAYS FREE TRIAL Your $3.00 unconditionally returned if at end of 10 days you are not satisfied with this late model UNDERWOOD typewriter rebuilt by the famous Shipman Ward process.

GREAT PRICE SAVING Direct to you from the largest typewriter factory in the world by our money saving methods.

EASY MONTHLY PAYMENTS So small that you will not notice it while you enjoy the use of this wonderful machine.

FREE BOOK OF FACTS Explaining Shipman Ward's wonderful system of rebuilding typewriters and also valuable information about the typewriter industry both instructive and entertaining.

Act Today! Mail Coupon

5 Year Guarantee

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Montrose & Ravenswood
Aves., Chicago

Please send me a copy of your free book of facts, explaining bargain offer.

Name...

St. and No.......................................

City............................ State...............

BUCHSTEIN'S FIBRE LIMB

is soothing to your stump,—strong, cool, neat, light. Guaranteed 5 years. Easy payments.

Also fibre arms, and braces for all deformities

Send for Catalog Today

N. Buchstein Co., 610 3rd Ave., S. Minneapolis, Minn.

Be Good to Your EYES

Like the hair, skin and teeth, one's EYES are deserving of regular care. A few drops of *Murine,* night and morning, will drive away dullness and keep them clear, bright and healthy. Absolutely harmless.

Write Murine Company, Dept. 61, Chicago, for FREE Eye Care Book

MURINE FOR YOUR EYES

FRECKLES

Don't Hide Them With a Veil; Remove Them With Othine—Double Strength

This preparation for the treatment of freckles is so successful in removing freckles and giving a clear, beautiful complexion that it is sold under guarantee to refund the money if it fails.

Don't hide your freckles under a veil; get an ounce of Othine and remove them. Even the first few applications should show a wonderful improvement, some of the lighter freckles vanishing entirely.

Be sure to ask the druggist for the double-strength Othine: it is this that is sold on the money-back guarantee.

Stop Using a Truss

Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made self-adhesive purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone.** Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

Grand Prix.

Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE** Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY.**

Plapao Co., 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Name..

Address...

Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao..................

The Argosy-Allstory Weekly

OUT EVERY THURSDAY

Ten Cents *At All News-stands*

Stirrup cups belong

to the past—they're old fashioned.

Crawford Shoes are up to the minute—in style right now. They're men's shoes built to suit a man's tastes—

They won't run over or get out of shape, they'll stand the gaff of service, and they'll always look right!

Men who don't wear Crawford Shoes are missing something worth while—

But don't take our word, try on a pair and see.

Drop in on the Crawford dealer in your neighborhood (he runs the best shoe store in the vicinity) and see for yourself the value you get in

The Crawford Shoe

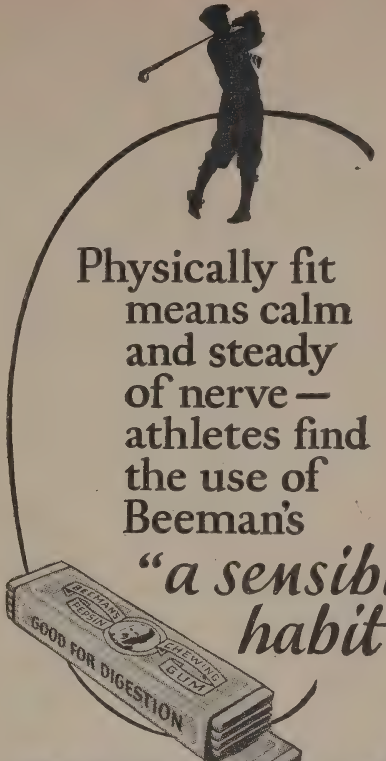
MOST STYLES

$8

CHARLES A. EATON SHOE INDUSTRIES

BROCKTON, MASS.

© 1923



Physically fit means calm and steady of nerve—athletes find the use of Beeman's *"a sensible habit"*

BEEMAN'S

Pepsin Gum

AMERICAN CHICLE CO.

No Joke To Be Deaf

—Every Deaf Person Knows That

I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with my Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. They stop head-noises. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I became deaf and how I make you hear. Address

GEO. P. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.)
31 Hoffman Bldg., 2539 Woodward Ave., Detroit, Mich.

LOFTIS BROS. & CO. EST'D 1858

DIAMONDS WATCHES

CASH or CREDIT

No. 30 **$100** Brilliant, Blue White Diamond. Solid 18-k White Gold Delivered on first payment of $10, then **$2.50 A WEEK.**

No. 27 **$75** Dazzling, Blue White Diamond. Solid 18-k White Gold. Delivered on first payment of $7.50 then **$1.75 A WEEK**

WRIST WATCH

18-K Solid White Gold, 17 Jewels, $29.75
14-K Solid White Gold, 15 Jewels, $24.85
Delivered on first payment of $3.00; then $1.00 a week thereafter until paid.

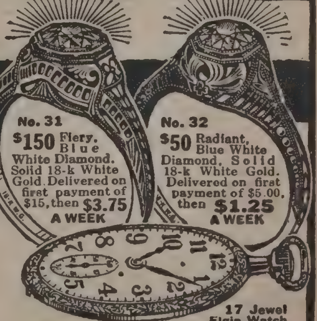
Send for Catalog

Over 2,000 illustrations of Diamond-set Jewelry, Watches, Wrist Watches, Pearls, Mesh Bags, Silverware, etc. Sent prepaid for your Free Examination. Catalog explains everything. **Satisfaction Guaranteed or Money Refunded.**

RAILROAD WATCHES—Guaranteed to Pass Inspection

NEW MODEL HOWARD, 21 Jewels, Adjusted to 5 Positions. Extra quality Gold filled Case - - - - **$80**
ILLINOIS "BUNN SPECIAL," 21 Jewels, Adjusted to 6 Positions. Gold filled 25-year Case - - - - **$50**

LOFTIS BROS. & CO. **National Jewelers**
Dept. N-850 **108 N. State Street, Chicago, Ill.**
Stores in Leading Cities



No. 31 **$150** Fiery, Blue White Diamond. Solid 18-k White Gold. Delivered on first payment of $15, then **$3.75 A WEEK**

No. 32 **$50** Radiant, Blue White Diamond, Solid 18-k White Gold. Delivered on first payment of $5.00, then **$1.25 A WEEK**

17 Jewel Elgin Watch

No. 15. Green Gold, filled, assorted patterns. Guaranteed 25 years, 12 size, gilt dial **$32.** **Delivered on first payment of $3.25; then $1.00 a week thereafter until paid.**

"What a whale of a difference just a few cents make!"
—all the difference
between just an ordinary cigarette and—FATIMA, the most skillful blend in cigarette history.

AUTOMOBILE MAKES 27 MILES ON AIR

An automobile goes 27 miles on air by using an automatic device which was installed in less than 5 minutes. The automobile was only making 30 miles on a gallon of gasoline, but after this remarkable invention was installed it made better than 57. The inventor, Mr. J. A. Stransky, 622 Eleventh Street, Pukwana, South Dakota, wants agents and is willing to send a sample at his own risk. Write him today.

LEARN Electricity

Great School of Coyne—complete in 3½ months. Big outlay of electrical equipment.

Free Railroad Fare

Enter anytime. Special limited offer. Drafting and Radio Free. *Send for big free catalog.* Act now!

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL—DEPT. 14-15
1300-1310 West Harrison Street, Chicago, Illinois

Have you ever tried it this way?

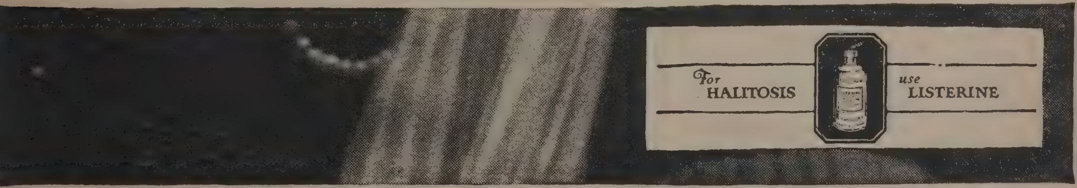
YOU know, of course, that Listerine has dozens of uses as a safe antiseptic. But do you know of its unusual properties as a safe non-irritating deodorant?

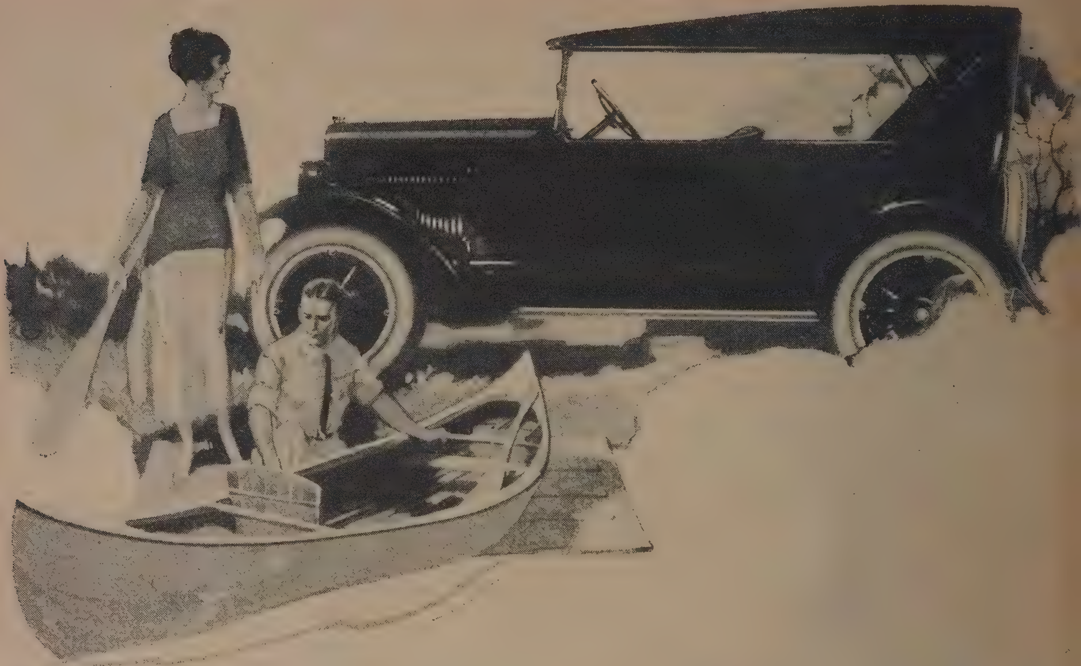
Whenever you don't have time for a tub or shower, or when these are not accessible, simply try dousing on Listerine. See how cool, refreshed and clean it leaves you feeling.

And best of all, Listerine used this way as a deodorant cannot irritate or injure the most delicate skin. Rather, it is soothing, healing, evaporates quickly, and cannot stain garments. It is the ideal deodorant.

Try Listerine this way some afternoon when you feel hot and sticky after a game of tennis; or some day when you have just finished a hot afternoon's shopping; or when you are on a motor trip and it's miles between tubs; or when you are traveling and you miss the old shower 'way back home.

You will be delighted with the refreshing, exhilarating effect and you will pass this suggestion along to your friends.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*





Live on the Sunny Side of Life

When it comes to real pleasure, nobody gets more out of an automobile than Overland owners. Overland is scattering sunshine in hundreds of thousands of homes—all over the map. It is making people happier, healthier and *wiser* about automobiles.

Overland has swept aside the old notion that you have to spend a lot of money for a quality automobile. In Overland you get big-car power and big-car comfort—and all the easy-handling and low-upkeep advantages of a light car. Hundreds of two-car families leave their heavy, cumbersome car stand in the garage most of the time while they drive around and enjoy themselves in an Overland.

You can drive Overland from sun-up to sun-down, week in and month out—drive it without mercy—and you'll find it dependable. Overland is at once a *joy* and a *saving*—from the first day you own it on and on through a long, long life of faithful service. Owners have good reason to call it the most automobile in the world for the money.

Other Models: Chassis $395; Roadster $495; Champion $655; Sedan $795; Spad Commercial Car $523; all prices f. o. b. Toledo. We reserve the right to change prices and specifications without notice.

Willys-Overland, Inc., Toledo, O. • Willys-Overland Sales Co. Ltd., Toronto, Can.

Overland

Touring $495

f.o.b. Toledo

Keep a Kodak story of the children

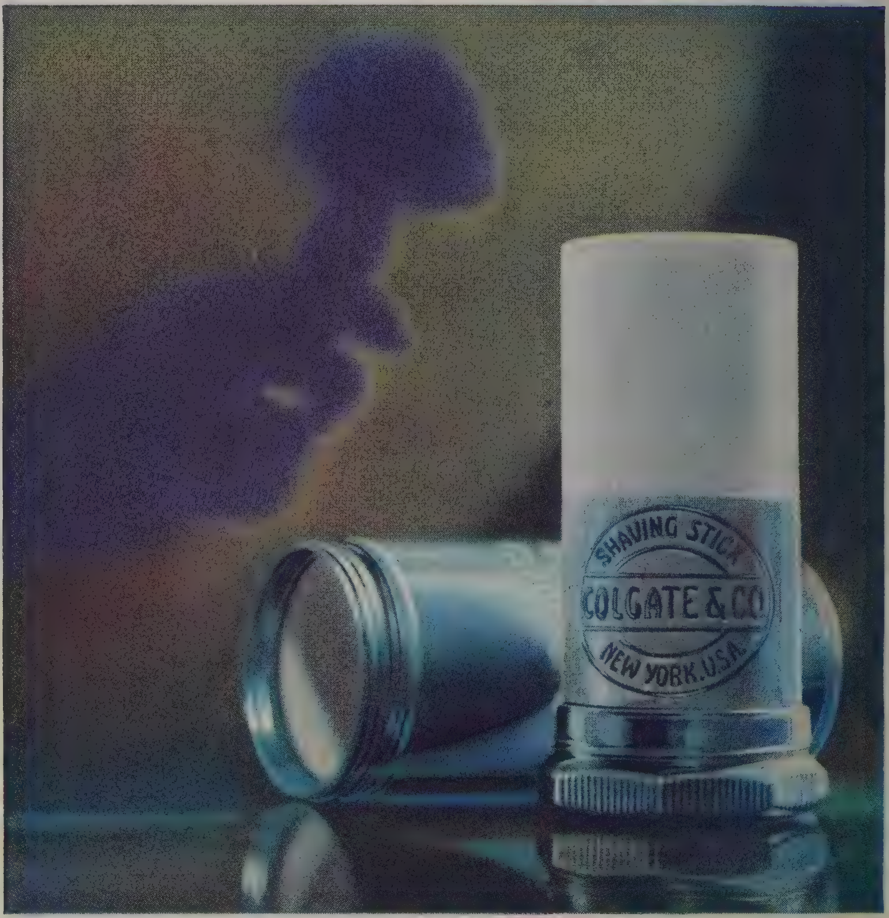
Autographic Kodaks *$6.50* up

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., *The Kodak City*

COLGATE'S

Shaving Stick

"HANDY GRIP" AND REFILL



For Comfort, Convenience and Economy

When we say to you that the Shaving Stick has important advantages over shaving preparations in any other form, we can do so without bias, for we manufacture shaving sticks, powder and cream.

In its attractive nickel box, our "Handy Grip" Shaving Stick is most convenient for traveling. It will not crush when packed, and it makes a wonderful lather for *easy shaving.*

It is not uncommon for a Colgate Shaving Stick to last more than a year in daily use.

The famous "Handy Grip", with a trial-size shaving stick in nickel box, sent for 10c. When the trial stick is gone, buy Colgate "Refills" for the price of the soap alone, 25c.

COLGATE & CO. ◆ *Established 1806* ◆ NEW YORK

Truth in advertising implies honesty in manufacture

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3 0112 125152162